



JUDICIAL MERIT SELECTION COMMISSION
Sworn Statement to be included in Transcript of Public Hearings

Family Court
(New Candidate)

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1. Why do you want to serve as a Family Court Judge?

I was born and raised in the City of Laurens. My parents instilled a strong work ethic and desire to help people. Growing up in a small town helped shape me into a well-rounded and compassionate person. When I was a young child, my parents stressed the importance of being kind and helping others in need. They also taught me that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, no matter their background or community standing. These ideals have helped shape my calm demeanor, temperament, and compassion which are the core principles and beliefs reflected in my personal and professional life.

After graduating law school in 2013, I went to work for a solo practitioner who had successfully run his law firm for over 40 years. I began practicing family law and was fortunate to have the mentorship of the older partner and several other experienced lawyers with whom I trusted. I learned how to be respectful and courteous to all litigants, even though some represent contrary positions.

To gain a diversified experience of law, I joined Solicitor David M. Stumbo's office as an Assistant Solicitor in the Eighth Judicial Circuit. During my tenure as an Assistant Solicitor in Laurens, I had the opportunity to try numerous jury trials, obtaining guilty verdicts in a variety of offenses including murder, kidnapping, domestic violence, drug trafficking and other violent crimes. Having fulfilled my desire to strengthen my trial skills, I felt compelled to return to the practice of family law. I accepted a position with one of the largest family law

firms in the country, where I have practiced exclusively in the Family Court. This role has allowed me the opportunity to practice family law in almost every county in upstate, South Carolina.

At my current firm, I was promoted to Regional Managing Attorney. In this capacity, I have the responsibility of managing all 15 of our firm's South Carolina attorneys and legal staff.

I believe I am in the prime of my legal career, but the desire to help others through public service compels me to be a Family Court judge. My work ethic, skillset, and life experiences within my community will allow me to have a positive impact on thousands of lives; if I were to continue in my current role, I am only able to help a much smaller number of people.

Family Court judges play a crucial role in resolving conflicts, ensuring the well-being of children, and promoting fair outcomes in some of the most intimate familial disputes. Each decision they make will likely have a permanent impact on someone's life. It is extremely important that those decisions are well thought out and reasoned. I understand the importance of the job, and if given the opportunity to serve as a Family Court judge, I will continue to work tirelessly to make a positive impact on the judiciary and on the people of our State.

2. Do you plan to serve your full term if elected?

Yes.

3. Do you have any plans to return to private practice one day?

No.

4. Have you met the statutory requirements for this position regarding age, residence, and years of practice?

Yes.

5. What is your philosophy regarding *ex parte* communications? Are there circumstances under which you could envision *ex parte* communications being tolerated?

It is important for a judge to give all parties with a legal interest in each matter the confidence of being treated fairly and the assurance of impartiality. The same can be said whether a judge is on the bench or outside of their judicial activities. Unless all parties who have a legal interest before the Court are present, ex parte communications are improper. However, there are a few exceptions for ex parte communications as outlined in Rule 3(B)(7) CJC Rule 501 SCACR.

In my own practice, I have filed expedited and/or emergency motions which included ex parte relief when I believed the safety and wellbeing of a minor child were in jeopardy. This relief should be nonprejudicial and only be ordered subject to an additional hearing where all litigants and interested parties may be heard. My philosophy is not to have nor consider ex parte communications unless those communications are within the exceptions of Rule 3(B)(7) CJC Rule 501 SCACR or as authorized by law.

6. If you disclosed something that had the appearance of bias, but you believed it would not actually prejudice your impartiality, what deference would you give a party that requested your recusal? Would you grant such a motion?

It is imperative that a judge gives all parties the confidence and appearance that they will be fair and impartial in their case. If either the litigants or attorneys believed that the disclosure would have an impact on their case in any way, I would grant a motion to be recused. It is important for the public to maintain the trust and confidence it has with the judiciary.

7. How would you handle the appearance of impropriety because of the financial or social involvement of your spouse or a close relative?

I would disclose the same prior to the proceeding and grant a motion to be recused. A judge should not preside over a proceeding in which their decision would directly or indirectly impact a known economic or social interest of their spouse or a close relative. I believe the language outlined in the Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3 E. (1) CJC Rule 501, SCARC supports this position. Further, I will pursue a policy of due diligence and reasonable inquiry sufficient in scope and detail to be reasonably informed as to the economic and/or social interests held by my spouse and close family relatives.

8. What standards would you set for yourself regarding the acceptance of gifts or social hospitality?

As a member of the judiciary, I would not accept gifts or social hospitality except as allowed by the Code of Judicial Conduct; Canon 4 D(5)(a) CJC Rule 501, SCARC. A judge's acceptance of gifts outside the confine of the aforementioned Canon is unwise and may give rise to the perception that the Court is compromised.

9. How would you handle a situation in which you became aware of misconduct or appearance of infirmity of a lawyer or of a fellow judge?

A judge's duties to handle such concerns are outlined in the Judicial Canons, specifically Canon 3(D), E and G. I would first speak with the lawyer or judge, if appropriate under the circumstances, who is alleged to have engaged in misconduct or was perceived to have an infirmity. After speaking with the individual, I would determine what appropriate action is necessary as outlined by our rules. If that misconduct or infirmity requires me to report the lawyer or judge to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel or Commission on Judicial Conduct, I would do so. If the conduct or infirmity was related to alcohol or substance abuse, I would refer them to the Bar's Lawyers Helping Lawyers program.

10. Are you a member of any organization or association that, by policy or practice, prohibits or limits its membership on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin? If so, please identify the entity and explain if this organization practices invidious discrimination on any basis.

No.

11. Have you engaged in any fund-raising activities with any political, social, community, or religious organizations? Please describe.

I have not engaged in any such activities as a judicial candidate. Throughout my life, I have volunteered in various roles within my community which requested donations of time and money from the public. These entities include Main Street Laurens, The Laurens County Museum, The Laurens County Trails Association, and my alma mater, Presbyterian College. As a past member in these organizations, I donated my time and money and encouraged others

to donate time and money as well. In the past, I have made donations to political candidates running for various municipal, state, and federal elections. I have donated annually to the Laurens County Shriner's International Race at the Laurens County Speedway; all proceeds from this event are donated to the Shriner's Hospital.

12. Do you have any business activities that you would envision remaining involved with if elected to the bench?

I am one of three members of TD Rentals, LLC which owns a single family home, used as a rental. This LLC is only used for the upkeep and collection of rental fees and rental agreements. If elected, I would either sell my interest to the other two members or sell the rental home and disband the LLC.

13. Since Family Court judges do not have law clerks, how would you handle the drafting of orders?

The drafting of Family Court Orders has traditionally fallen upon the shoulders of lawyers, and I shall continue this practice. I have confidence in the Family Court Bar's ability to draft clear and concise Orders after issuing a detailed ruling with instructions. All Court Orders, due to their conclusive nature must accurately reflect the Court's findings and decision. I shall carefully review all proposed Orders and edit, when necessary, prior to signing. I anticipate the majority of order directives will be delivered from the bench immediately upon the conclusion of the proceeding. However, in some instances involving more complex proceedings wherein research and further deliberation is required, I may timely draft an Order or memo and transmit my decision to the attorneys of record. My order directive shall be dual-calendared for myself and staff to ensure all Orders are timely issued and, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, signed not later than thirty (30) days after the conclusion of the proceeding.

14. If elected, what method would you use to ensure that you and your staff meet deadlines?

In my private practice, I do what is necessary to ensure all work is completed on time. If that means coming into work early or staying late, then that is what I will continue to do as a judge. I would continue to implement my own internal system I use in my private

practice regarding deadlines. I keep both an electronic and paper calendar for task management and deadline purposes. My paper calendar will continue to outline and include all my hearings and tasks required to be completed during the current week. I do not leave my office until all tasks and deadlines outlined on a given day are completed. My electronic calendar serves as a backup for the current week, but also allows me to set deadlines, recurring reminders for items due weeks in advance color coded for remaining time left for a given deadline. I would ensure that both calendars were always accessible to my staff who would be designated to assist in sending out reminders on deadlines and various administrative tasks.

15. If elected, what specific actions or steps would you take to ensure that the guidelines of the guardian ad litem statutes are followed during the pendency of a case?

In cases where a guardian ad litem is necessary, I would first confirm the guardian meets the qualifications necessary to serve as outlined in the South Carolina Private Guardian ad Litem Reform Act. In cases which already have a guardian appointed, I would review the file in detail before each hearing to confirm that the guardian is in compliance with their statutory duties, and they are progressing the case. I would not consider any custody recommendations by a guardian during litigation, and would confirm all parties have received a final report at least 20 days prior to the final hearing. This timeline is important as it allows litigants the necessary time to evaluate and prepare their case for the final hearing. In some cases, it may be appropriate to hold status conferences with the guardian ad litem and litigants to ensure the guardian's investigation is active and that no further financial or procedural relief by my order is needed for the guardian's investigation.

16. What is your philosophy on "judicial activism," and what effect should judges have in setting or promoting public policy?

I do not believe a judge's personal beliefs should interfere with their rulings nor should they attempt to set public policy. The role of a judge is to apply the law as set forth by the Legislature.

17. Canon 4 allows a judge to engage in activities to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice. What activities would you plan to undertake to further this improvement of the legal system?

As an attorney who has practiced in nearly every county in the upstate, I have found that my staff and I have occasional logistical issues relating to court administration in different circuits. Oftentimes, these nuances are only discovered by experience, which creates further delay in court administration. I believe it would be beneficial for members of the judiciary and county Clerks of Court to hold semiannual meetings with their circuit's bar members to listen to common administrative issues and determine ways to address them to become more efficient in the future. It is important for attorneys and litigants to know what to expect when dealing with administrative functions when they come to Family Court. I would plan to volunteer for various bar sponsored continuing education courses and participate in constructive dialogue as needed.

18. Do you feel that the pressure of serving as a judge would strain personal relationships (i.e. spouse, children, friends, or relatives)? How would you plan to address this?

I do not believe that the pressure of serving as a judge would create any more strain on my personal relationships than it would as a practicing attorney. The practice of law, and especially family law, always involves tough and stressful circumstances for everyone involved. Having worked in a large law firm as a regional managing attorney, I have continued to work my own large caseload while also managing over fifteen family law attorneys and staff. In my experience, to successfully practice law at a high volume while also managing others, you must be disciplined in your time management. I do what is necessary to complete all required work while also making time to be a present father and husband. This work ethic and standard is something my clients and family understand and appreciate. I believe my personal boundaries and time management skills would transition into my role as a judge, which will continue to allow me to maintain my strong relationships with my family, friends, and relatives.

19. Would you give any special considerations to a pro se litigant in family court?

A pro se litigant is entitled to be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness akin to treatment afforded to litigants with counsel. However, such treatment does not envision a marked departure from

substantial compliance with established Court rules and procedures. It is imperative that judicial requirements and procedure are uniformly applied both to represented and unrepresented litigants. To do otherwise would bring instability to the judicial process.

20. Are you involved in any active investments from which you derive additional income that might impair your appearance of impartiality?

No.

21. Would you hear a case where you or a member of your family held a *de minimis* financial interest in a party involved?

No.

22. Have you met the mandatory minimum hours requirement for continuing legal education courses for the past reporting period?

Yes.

23. What do you feel is the appropriate demeanor for a judge and when do these rules apply?

All aspects of family law involve intimate and emotional details about one's personal life. These details may include litigants who may feel shame, embarrassment, sadness, or grief. It is important for a Family Court judge to remember they preside over highly emotional parties, and therefore their demeanor and temperament must reflect an understanding of their emotions. A Family Court judge must be compassionate, caring, and well-reasoned in their decisions. There is no place in any court for a judge to belittle or embarrass a lawyer or litigant. I believe a judge should treat all people equally with respect and dignity. These principles should not just be on the bench, but also outside of judicial activities.

24. Do you feel that it is ever appropriate to be angry with a member of the public who would appear before you, especially with a criminal defendant? Is anger ever appropriate in dealing with attorneys or a pro se litigant?

No. While a judge must be able to have control of the courtroom, they should do so with patience, dignity, and courtesy. A judge

displaying anger in the discharge of their judicial duties does violence to the judicial concepts of impartiality, trust, and respect. Further, anger robs a judge of their ability to invoke common sense and pragmatic solutions to aggravated factual situations. A judge's interaction with a criminal defendant must exhibit fairness and impartiality. Any display of anger, or hint of hostility, cannot be permitted. I believe the ideal judge is friendly and compassionate, but also firm.

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ANSWERS TO THE ABOVE QUESTIONS ARE TRUE AND COMPLETE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE.

Sworn to before me this ____ day of _____, 2024.

(Signature)

(Print name)
Notary Public for South Carolina
My commission expires: _____