



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

Family Court
(New Candidate)

Full Name: Jonathan Drew Hammond

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

I am seeking to be elected as a Family Court Judge because of my passion and desire to serve the citizens of South Carolina. I have been licensed to practice law for more than 22 years, and I have been involved in a variety of cases. I believe that I have the experience, compassion and demeanor to preside with professionalism and understanding as a Family Court Judge. I truly believe my calling is to serve as a Judge of the Family Court, and I am humbled by the opportunity to seek a position as a Family Court Judge.

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

I intend to serve the full term if I am elected to the Family Court. In fact, I do not anticipate seeking election to any other judicial position if I am elected to the Family Court.

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

If I am elected to the Family Court, it would be my desire and intention to continue in that position for as long as I am able to serve.

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

I meet the statutory requirements to be elected to the Family Court and serve as a Judge of the Family Court.

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

I believe that *ex parte* communications with a Family Court Judge regarding a pending matter are prohibited under most circumstances. This general prohibition is not only set forth in the rules governing the conduct of attorneys and judges, I believe it is a necessary and appropriate restriction to ensure the integrity and sanctity of the judicial process. Of course, there is a process in Family Court through which a party may seek extraordinary, *ex parte* relief from the Court based on imminent and substantial risk of harm to a minor child or vulnerable adult. However, a Family Court Judge must be discerning and diligent in considering such requests for extraordinary relief to ensure that the process is not abused by litigants. Moreover, a Family Court Judge is obligated to ensure that all litigants have access to seek equitable relief from the Family Court, which includes attention to the fundamental rights of due process to all parties involved in a matter pending before the Court.

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?

If I identified a situation that appeared to have any appearance of bias on my part, I would disclose the nature of the issue to all parties involved prior to addressing the substance of any matter pertaining to the parties. I believe that a presiding Judge of the Family Court should maintain an impartial position at all times, even when there is only an appearance of bias in a matter. In the event a party questioned my ability to maintain impartiality, I believe the appropriate action would be to recuse myself from presiding over the matter.

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

As stated in my response to the previous question, I believe that a Family Court Judge is obligated to maintain impartiality in order to serve and preside over matters before the Court. In the event that a matter came before me that gave rise to an appearance of

impartiality, I believe the proper action is to identify the issue for all parties and err on the side of caution to remove myself from any appearance of impropriety.

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

In order to preserve the integrity of the Court and maintain impartiality, both in substance and appearance, I would decline to accept gifts or offers of social hospitality outside of events expressly sanctioned by the State Supreme Court and/or the applicable Judicial Canons.

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?

If I became aware of a situation involving misconduct or appearance of infirmity by a lawyer or fellow judge, I would take steps to identify the issue swiftly and discreetly in an effort to minimize harm to any person involved in the situation. However, I believe that the rules governing the legal profession compel a Judge to report misconduct without hesitation and, therefore, I would make any and all necessary reports to the appropriate governing agency if I identified a need to do so.

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.

I am not a member of any such organization or association.

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 fund-raising activities with any organizations.

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

I do not envision being involved in any business activities if I am elected to the bench.

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

It is my understanding that certain Judicial circuits recently have been able to hire law clerks to rotate between the Judges of the Family Court. I further understand that the common practice in Family Court is to direct counsel for parties to draft proposed orders from hearings before the Court. I anticipate that I would look to continue that practice, as it seems to be successful in most circumstances. I would also set specific timelines for proposed orders to be submitted to prevent unnecessary delay in matters moving forward to resolution. However, I consider myself to be a self-sufficient and capable legal researcher and writer. I certainly would not hesitate to prepare any order that should be drafted by the Court in a timely manner.

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

If I am elected to the Family Court, I would always be mindful of the significance of each matter pending before the Court. In this regard, I anticipate using both electronic and paper calendars and checklists for myself and my staff to ensure timeliness and diligence in completing tasks. The parties and any children involved in a matter pending before the Family Court certainly deserve the attention and diligence of the Court to avoid and prevent unnecessary delay in resolution.

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?

I often serve as Guardian *ad Litem* ("GAL) in matters pending before the Family Court and, therefore, I am very familiar with the applicable statutory guidelines addressing the GAL. I believe the role of the GAL is very important in contested matters involving a minor child. If I am elected as a Family Court Judge, I would issue any necessary order(s) to appoint and/or authorize a GAL to investigate and

advocate on behalf of a minor child of interest in a matter. I would request input from the GAL to receive observations and recommendations on behalf of the minor child by way of a written report or testimony. However, I would always be sure to issue decisions based on the evidence, law and, most importantly, best interests of the minor child. I believe the Family Court should be willing to consider input from the GAL, but necessarily adopt such recommendations. In fact, there may be instances where the input of the GAL is contrary to the best interests of the child and the GAL recommendations should not be considered.

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

I do not believe “judicial activism” is appropriate for a Judge, especially in the Family Court. A Family Court Judge serves the public to make decisions for parties that are based on the law enacted by the legislature and the evidence that is presented in a matter pending before the Court. I do not believe that a Family Court Judge should render decisions for the purpose of promoting public policy, as such an agenda could be contrary to the duties of the Judge to follow the law and preside with impartiality.

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?

At this time, I am not aware of any specific activities that I may be inclined to undertake to improve the legal system in the Family Court. However, I believe that there is always room for improvement, and I would have an open mind for identifying opportunities to make the Family Court a more accessible forum for parties who may appear before the Court.

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 anticipate that any pressure I may experience serving as a Family Court Judge would cause my personal relationships to be unduly strained. I believe that serving as a Family Court Judge would be such an honor and a privilege that any pressure from the

position would be muted in large part. I try to be very intentional about maintaining a focus on my health and well-being so that I can be a better person for my family, friends, clients and all those who rely upon me. I intend to maintain my focus on my own health if I am elected to the Family Court so that I am able to serve effectively and positively.

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

I recognize and acknowledge the importance of every person having access to the Family Court, whether represented by counsel or not. I certainly would not impede a pro se litigant's ability to seek relief from the Family Court in accordance with the laws of South Carolina. However, I believe that a pro se litigant must not be given deferential treatment in seeking relief from the Court. Moreover, I would take caution to avoid offering any input to a pro se litigant that could be interpreted as advice or guidance from the Court. A pro se litigant (like any represented party) is deserving of patience, but not special treatment from the Court.

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?

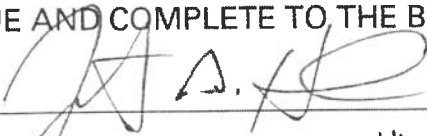
A Family Court Judge should have a patient and calm demeanor that accommodates people from all backgrounds and situations. A Family Court Judge should always be fair, but firm in presiding over matters

before the Court. I try to maintain this demeanor both professionally and personally, and I believe it is the same attitude and demeanor that I would maintain if I am elected to the Family Court.

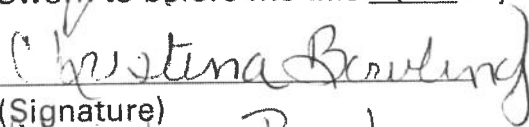
24. Do you feel that it is ever appropriate to be angry with a member of the public who would appear before you, especially with a criminal defendant? Is anger ever appropriate in dealing with attorneys or a pro se litigant?

A Family Court Judge will encounter a wide range of emotions in any given matter or on any given day. Unfortunately, anger is an emotion that can be common for parties and practitioners that appear in proceedings before the Family Court. However, I do not believe that a Family Court Judge should harbor anger or resentment toward any person or entity that may appear before the Court. I regularly remind myself that offering grace to someone may not be the initial reaction to conflict or the easiest path to resolve a dispute. A Family Court Judge should be prepared to offer grace even in the most difficult of situations in order to preside with impartiality and render judgments that are equitable.

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 28th day of August, 2024.



(Signature)



(Print name)

Notary Public for South Carolina

My commission expires: 3/9/2027