

Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office
3/4/26

Name: Melanie Marie Headley

Office Address: 201 Poplar Avenue, 11th Floor
(including county) Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee 38103

Office Phone: 901-222-1326 Facsimile: 901-222-7971

Email Address:

Home Address:
(including county)

Cellular Phone:

INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Code Annotated section 17-4-301 et seq. charges the Trial Court Vacancy Commission with assisting the Governor and the People of Tennessee in finding and appointing the best qualified candidates for judicial offices in this State. Please consider the Commission's responsibility in answering the questions in this application questionnaire. For example, when a question asks you to "describe" certain things, please provide a description that contains relevant information about the subject of the question and, especially, that contains detailed information that demonstrates that you are qualified for the judicial office you seek. In order to properly evaluate your application, the Commission needs information about the range of your experience, the depth and breadth of your legal knowledge, and your personal traits such as integrity, fairness, and work habits.

This document is available in Microsoft Word format from the Administrative Office of the Courts (telephone 800-448-7970 or 615-741-2687; website www.tncourts.gov). The Commission requests that applicants obtain the Microsoft Word form and respond directly on the form. Respond in the box provided below each question. (The box will expand as you type in the document.) Review the separate instruction sheet prior to completing this document. Your complete application, including both the original and digital copies, must be received by the Administrative Office of the Courts on or before the deadline prescribed in the Notice of Vacancy. See section 1(g) of the application instructions for additional information related to hand-delivery of application packages.

THIS APPLICATION IS OPEN TO PUBLIC INSPECTION AFTER YOU SUBMIT IT.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND WORK EXPERIENCE

1. State your present employment.

I am an Assistant District Attorney in the Shelby County District Attorney's Office in Memphis, Tennessee.

2. State the year you were licensed to practice law in Tennessee and give your Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility number.

I was licensed to practice in 2006. My Board of Professional Responsibility number is 025336.

3. List all states in which you have been licensed to practice law and include your bar number or identifying number for each state of admission. Indicate the date of licensure and whether the license is currently active. If not active, explain.

I am also licensed in Mississippi. I have been licensed there since 2007. My Mississippi bar number is 102474. The license is currently in good standing but in inactive status as I am not engaged in the practice of law in Mississippi.

4. Have you ever been denied admission to, suspended or placed on inactive status by the Bar of any State? If so, explain. (This applies even if the denial was temporary).

No.

5. List your professional or business employment/experience since the completion of your legal education. Also include here a description of any occupation, business, or profession other than the practice of law in which you have ever been engaged (excluding military service, which is covered by a separate question).

I was hired by Harris Shelton Hanover Walsh in Memphis, Tennessee upon graduation from law school. I clerked there during my third year of law school. Upon graduation, I was offered a position as an associate. I began that position in August 2006. During my time at Harris Shelton, I handled civil litigation in a variety of areas: eminent domain, medical malpractice defense, commercial and business litigation, and employment law. I spent several years working directly with Max Shelton, the managing partner, who was the court-appointed receiver in complex,

multi-phase litigation involving misallocation of trust funds of several local cemeteries and funeral homes.

I left Harris Shelton in 2009 when I had my son. I stayed home with him for about a year and a half. When I was ready to return to practice, I sought a position that would offer more courtroom and trial experience. During law school, I had clerked at Ballin Ballin and Fishman, where I observed Marvin and Leslie Ballin's vigorous advocacy in both state and federal criminal proceedings. That experience made clear that the District Attorney's Office would provide the hands-on trial experience I sought.

I was hired by Bill Gibbons, then District Attorney, in August 2010 to be an Assistant District Attorney in the Shelby County District Attorney's Office. My time in the office began in General Sessions. During this time, I developed a foundational grounding in criminal procedure and high-volume docket management. My first assignment was in General Sessions 13 with Judge Louis Montesi. In addition to my colleagues, Judge Montesi was a great teacher and mentor for me. He was thorough in all matters and took the time to follow proper protocols to make sure every defendant was making informed decisions.

I quickly moved to the Preliminary Hearing team. I conducted between six and twelve preliminary hearings daily, covering a wide range of matters— burglaries, shootings, robberies, thefts, and homicides. This work proved an invaluable foundation for assessing case strength and quickly organizing and presenting evidence to establish probable cause. The assignment also rotated through multiple General Sessions courtrooms, providing early and repeated exposure to different judges and their approaches— an education in judicial temperament that I have drawn on throughout my career.

After about a year and a half with the office, I was moved to Criminal Court. My first assignment was before Judge Paula Skahan in Criminal Court I. During this period, I began to manage my own caseload and to finally get my first trial experience. My next assignment was in Criminal Court III with Judge Bobby Carter. Judge Carter came to the bench from prosecution. He took very seriously the efficient movement of his cases. I learned as a prosecutor to adapt to this pace and always be prepared. I then went to Criminal Court VI where I practiced before then newly appointed Judge John Campbell. Judge Campbell was a prosecutor I had known from the D.A.'s office before his appointment. I tried the first case Judge Campbell presided over after his appointment to the bench. Judge Campbell was able to use his vast legal knowledge to ensure all matters heard before him followed proper procedure. My next assignment was before Judge Chris Craft in Criminal Court VIII. Judge Craft's years as both a prosecutor and defense attorney had given him an exacting standard for what courtroom preparation looks like. He presided over a major violator court at that time. Our office referred to these courts as the Special Prosecution Unit. At that time both Criminal Court VII, Judge Lee Coffee and Criminal Court VIII, Judge Chris Craft were designated as the Special Prosecution Courts. These courts were designated by local order to handle offenders who had particularly lengthy and violent criminal histories. I tried the bulk of my cases before Judge Craft. He generously shares his considerable legal knowledge. He is a meticulous judge who expects nothing less than rigorous preparation and strict procedural discipline from all practitioners. This required me to elevate my practice to meet those standards. My years in this courtroom taught me not only how to try difficult cases,

but also how experienced judges manage lawyers, juries, victims, defendants, and crowded dockets with consistency and professionalism.

In all these criminal court assignments, I managed a caseload of several hundred cases, including homicide cases, robberies, shootings, burglaries, and rape. I also handled post-conviction matters. I tried many cases over the years and gained invaluable experience. I developed the skills to try a case effectively. I gained considerable knowledge from observing each of these judges preside.

After 12 years with the District Attorney's Office, I was hired by Mike Dunavant, United States Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee to be an Assistant United States Attorney. I began my time with the U.S. Attorney's Office in October 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. I appeared before Magistrate and District Courts handling detention hearings, motions to suppress, guilty pleas, sentencings, and trials.

I was assigned to the Organized Crime Unit and Drug Enforcement Task Force Unit. This Unit focused on prosecuting and dismantling drug trafficking organizations and on a local, national, and transnational level. My work there focused on long term investigations, working closely with multiple federal law enforcement agencies to develop cases using a variety of methods including court-authorized wiretaps, warrants, and subpoenas. While at the U.S. Attorney's Office, I was also able to develop and hone my writing skills by handling numerous motions to suppress and a variety of other written motions and responses.

After a couple years at the U.S. Attorney's office, I began to miss the pace of constant court activity and direct engagement with the Shelby County community through serving the victims of violent crime. In September 2022, I left the U.S. Attorney's Office and returned to the District Attorney's Office. Upon my return, I was assigned to the Gang and Narcotics Prosecution Unit, which handles all felony drug arrests in Shelby County as well as gang-related homicides and other violent crimes. My supervisor in that unit was Paul Hagerman. In August 2023, less than a year after my return to the office, I was appointed Chief Prosecutor of the Gang and Narcotics Unit upon Mr. Hagerman's promotion to Deputy District Attorney. I remain in that position today. Currently, I manage a team of about 15, currently comprising seven attorneys. As part of this position, I supervise Criminal Court VI, Judge David Pool and General Sessions 8, Judge Lee Wilson. These courtrooms function at an exceedingly high capacity with daily dockets of around 80-100 cases. Because of the extremely high volume of General Sessions 8, we have a second courtroom presided over by a judicial commissioner. These courts manage all of the narcotics cases. The experience of managing these heavy caseloads over the last couple of years will be an asset on the bench. I also manage a personal caseload of about 30 homicides and other gang related violent matters in the other criminal courts. I am responsible for five other attorneys on my team who are handling other violent, gang related matters. These past two years managing a team of attorneys will serve me well if I am appointed to this position. I have dealt with conflict resolution among my team members who have a variety of personalities, skill sets, and experience. I have learned to balance my own caseload while managing these high volume courtrooms. This skill set should translate well to the bench.

Other employment:

After graduating from the University of Mississippi, I moved to Memphis with hopes of attending medical school. When I was not offered admission, I accepted a position teaching sixth-grade mathematics and science at Tipton Rosemark Academy in Millington, Tennessee. Teaching proved a formative experience — it sharpened my ability to explain complex concepts clearly and to engage students with varying backgrounds and aptitudes.

During that period, I also worked in the service industry in downtown Memphis. In that environment I had frequent contact with attorneys from a wide range of practice backgrounds. Listening to them discuss their cases and observing the passion they brought to representing their clients, persuaded me that law was the right path. I took the LSAT and was accepted to the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis.

The professional relationships I formed during those years proved lasting. Through connections made in that community, I secured clerkships at Ballin Ballin and Fishman and later at Harris Shelton Hanover Walsh — the latter of which led directly to my first position as an associate attorney.

6. Describe the nature of your present law practice, listing the major areas of law in which you practice and the percentage each constitutes of your total practice.

My current practice is 100% in the criminal courts in Shelby County. As Chief Prosecutor of the Gang and Narcotics Unit, I am responsible for 3 different courtrooms. Those courtrooms process all of the felony narcotics cases in Shelby County. In addition to supervising those courtrooms, I also maintain a case load involving gang homicides. My current caseload involves approximately 30 homicides pending in any of the nine criminal courts. In addition to these responsibilities, I work closely advising a variety of law enforcement agencies. I am on call 24/7 as a homicide advisor. I frequently meet with Memphis Police Department homicide investigators to advise on charges or next steps in the investigation. I also advise Shelby County Narcotics, Memphis Police Department Multi-Agency Gang Unit, and Memphis Police Department Organized Crime Unit. As part of my work with these units, I advise on and approve defendants to work as confidential informants. Additionally, I advise the Memphis Police Department Cold Case Unit and the Memphis Police Department Heroin Opioid Response Team. I attend weekly meetings with federal partners for the Project Safe Neighborhood program. In these meetings, local and federal law enforcement along with representatives from the U.S. Attorney's Office and I meet to discuss all arrests involving a firearm to determine if those will be prosecuted federally or at the state level. Because of my time with the federal government, I maintain close contacts with federal law enforcement partners as well as the U.S. Attorney's office, frequently assisting them with proffers, confidential informants, and other matters. My courtroom experience, coupled with my wealth of experience advising law enforcement, will be a significant asset on the bench. Judges in the criminal courts must do far more than preside over dockets and trials. For example, they review search warrant applications, authorize Title III wiretap investigations, and issue a range of investigative orders that drive complex prosecutions. I have spent years on the other side of each of those functions, advising investigators and approving the very types of applications that would come before me on the bench. My experience will help me evaluate those applications carefully, independently, and in accordance with the law.

7. Describe generally your experience (over your entire time as a licensed attorney) in trial courts, appellate courts, administrative bodies, legislative or regulatory bodies, other forums, and/or transactional matters.

During my civil practice, I appeared primarily in the circuit courts. Since my time as a prosecutor, I have appeared exclusively in criminal courts. As mentioned above, that practice has been at both the State and Federal level. At the state level, that includes both general sessions and state level criminal courts. At the federal level, that included appearances before magistrates and district court.

Overall, the bulk of my experience has been in state trial courts, the very court for which I now seek appointment.

8. Describe any matters of special note involving your practice in trial courts, appellate courts, and administrative bodies.

In January 2023, I became involved in the investigation and ultimately, the prosecution of the Tyre Nichols case. In early January 2023, Tyre Nichols was severely beaten by 5 Memphis Police Officers. Nichols died in the hospital a few days after the beating. From the outset this case involved significant media attention, not only locally, but nationally. This was the most high-profile case of my career. I was involved in the case from day one. I worked tirelessly in the beginning to watch all of the body camera footage in the case, taking extensive notes. I participated with law enforcement partners and the U.S. Attorney's Office in proffers of several of the defendants as well as other potential witnesses. Working closely with the trial team which included Paul Hagerman and Tanisha Johnson, as well as the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, we were able to review all evidence and make charging decisions. We worked deliberately to ensure that charging decisions were supported by the evidence despite extraordinary public attention. Over the next few years, we worked efficiently and in close coordination with our federal partners to try to get justice for the Nichols family. Ultimately, two of the officers pleaded guilty in federal court and three others were tried. Based on the outcome of the federal trial, we decided to move forward with the state prosecution of the same three officers. That trial was held in April and May of 2025. We traveled to Chattanooga to empanel a jury. The jury was then brought to Memphis for the trial. We developed a case strategy that we believed streamlined the case and focused on our best evidence, which we believed was the video in the case. Although we believed the evidence supported conviction, the jury reached a different conclusion. Respect for the rule of law requires respect for the jury's role, even when the outcome is disappointing. In my first trial that garnered national attention, I received not guilty verdicts on all counts. This was one of the most humbling experiences of my career. This experience reinforced for me that our justice system depends upon each participant faithfully performing a distinct role. A prosecutor prepares and presents the best possible case. A judge ensures fair process. A jury decides the facts. I respect that process entirely.

In *State v. Anthony Ellis and Lloyd Crawford*, I prosecuted a matter that required careful statutory analysis and a novel application of Tennessee's felony murder doctrine. The defendants, together with a third co-conspirator, conspired to commit a robbery of a known drug dealer. They lured the intended victim into their vehicle under the pretense of conducting a transaction. When the defendants attempted to rob him by force, multiple shots were fired inside the vehicle. The intended victim escaped with a gunshot wound to his hand. However, the co-conspirator, who was seated beside the victim, and had reached into the intended victim's pockets during the robbery, was struck and killed. The defendants then transported the mortally wounded co-conspirator before abandoning him on a public street. The matter was initially charged as reckless homicide. After reviewing the full statutory framework, however, I concluded that the felony murder doctrine provided a legally sound basis for holding the defendants accountable for their co-conspirator's death. He was a participant in the underlying robbery that produced the fatal shooting. This theory was contested and reviewed on appeal. However, the conviction was upheld. The case illustrates both the importance of rigorous statutory interpretation and the principle that the law should account for the full consequences of criminal conduct, even when those consequences fall on a co-conspirator rather than an

innocent victim.

I recently participated, along with several colleagues, in the case involving Devaron Taylor, where a Memphis Police Officer was shot and killed by friendly fire. Back in April of 2024, Memphis Police officers responded to a 911 call about a suspicious vehicle running in a field. Officers responded to the location. One officer approached the vehicle and could see it was occupied by a driver and a passenger, both appeared to be asleep and the passenger had a gun in his lap. The officers were able to verify that the vehicle was stolen. Additional officers responded to the scene. They approached on both the driver and passenger side. Shots were fired from the vehicle. Officers returned fire. Three officers were hit during the gunfire. The vehicle then left the scene, attempting to flee, but crashed a short time later. The suspects were ultimately taken into custody and identified as driver, Jaylon Lobley and passenger, Devaron Taylor. The injured officers and both defendants were all taken to Regional One Medical Center. Officer McKinney succumbed to his wounds there and was pronounced deceased. Defendant Lobley was also pronounced deceased. Taylor had significant injuries but recovered. He was prosecuted first in juvenile court. All officers in this incident were wearing department issued bodyworn cameras. Devaron Taylor's firearm had a machine gun conversion device on it. The officers were outgunned. Through TBI ballistics testing, we were able to determine that the bullet that killed Officer McKinney had been friendly fire. This was a devastating blow to the victim's family, as well as all involved officers. After careful review of Tennessee law, we concluded the evidence supported charging Taylor under a legally supportable theory of Second Degree Murder. This case was handled primarily in juvenile court by my colleagues, but then transferred for the plea to state court. We met repeatedly with the family to discuss the options available, particularly given Taylor's juvenile status. Ultimately, we negotiated the case on an information to come to Criminal Court and plead to an 18 year sentence on Facilitation of Second Degree Murder. The plea and sentencing with the victim impact statements from the family and involved officers was one of the most devastating things I have ever witnessed. This tragic case was one of the drivers for changing the law in the state of Tennessee related to machine gun conversion devices. They were a new technology being prosecuted under antiquated laws. In July 2025, the classification for a machine gun conversion device was changed from the lowest class of felony, an E with a sentence range of 1-6 years, to a class C felony with a range of 3-15 years.

I have participated in a number of Title III/wiretap cases both in federal court and in state court. During long term investigations into drug trafficking organizations, a wiretap is one of the best ways to truly infiltrate and dismantle the organization— from street level dealers all the way to the source of supply. My most recent wiretap case was investigated by the Shelby County Sheriff's Office. It was an 18 month investigation that began back in October 2024. Wiretap investigations involve meeting strict statutory requirements and ongoing judicial oversight occurs throughout the process. As a result of the investigation, I indicted 16 individuals for conspiracy to commit drug trafficking offenses as well as firearms offenses. As part of the investigation, we disrupted the conspired distribution of over 24 kilograms of cocaine (valued at over \$600,000). There were cash seizures of over \$110,000 and seizure of 17 vehicles used in the trafficking. We seized 7 firearms, including AR-style rifles. The result was the complete decimation of this criminal enterprise.

A recent gang investigation in which I participated has effectively dismantled a violent gang operation here in Memphis. (As this investigation is ongoing, I am not going to identify the gang or any of its members). I was contacted by a detective with the Multi-Agency Gang Unit in February who had been conducting surveillance and gathering information on this particular gang. We set up a meeting with members of the Memphis Police Department Homicide Bureau and Organized Crime Unit. We moved forward with a coordinated plan of attack— using all investigative tools at our disposal— social media, proffers, phone records, and jail calls to name a few. This was a fairly new hybrid gang that formed a couple years ago with ties to two more established local gangs. The leader of the gang is 24 years old and its oldest member. The co-leader and rap artist for the gang is 21 years old. They went about recruiting younger members from the area where they established control in their neighborhood. Our investigation has identified 13 documented gang members. The investigation identified approximately seven homicides this group is connected to in just the last two and a half years, as well as numerous shooting incidents, car thefts, and narcotics and firearms offenses. Through our concerted and directed focus on this violent group, we have been able to charge two homicides so far, as well as a variety of other aggravated assaults. At this point in time, the investigation continues. However, the two leaders are incarcerated with pending first degree murder charges. Approximately four of the other members are now incarcerated on criminal attempt murder charges and other violent offenses. Of the remaining members, three others are out of custody with pending charges and two are deceased. I worked closely with the gang unit and homicide investigators to move very quickly on the murder indictments and other cases. In a very short period of time, we have effectively dismantled this violent street gang.

These matters tell a consistent story: I have spent my career handling the most serious and complex criminal matters in this jurisdiction and at the federal level. The two new divisions being created in the Thirtieth Judicial District are designated by the Tennessee legislature as violent criminal courts, established specifically to address the most serious violent crime in our community, and my entire career has been spent prosecuting exactly those cases, in exactly these courts. I have developed novel legal theories that were contested and upheld on appeal. I have managed long-term, multi-agency investigations under Title III. I have worked under national scrutiny and stood by a verdict I did not want, because the jury's role deserves respect. The legal depth these cases have demanded, the judgment they have required, and the accountability they have tested are not qualities I would be developing from the bench. They are qualities I already have.

9. Describe any other legal experience, not stated above, that you would like to bring to the attention of the Commission.

Throughout my career, I have learned that leadership in the justice system requires judgment, honesty, and the courage to make difficult decisions even when those decisions are unpopular.

Since coming back to the D.A.'s office in 2022, I have worked in the Gang and Narcotics Unit.

In the last couple of years, the D.A.'s office has experienced significant turnover. We are feeling the impacts of the loss of institutional knowledge. One of my most important responsibilities as Chief Prosecutor has been helping younger attorneys develop sound judgment. Trial skills can be taught. Judgment— knowing when to try a case, when to negotiate, when to dismiss a case, and how to exercise discretion fairly— requires experience, mentorship, and honesty. Prosecutors are sometimes measured by convictions or trial victories. I have always believed our obligation is different. Our responsibility is to seek justice, which often requires judgment that extends beyond whether a case can be won. We are representing the citizens of Shelby County and fighting for victims' families. Trial is not always the path to the best outcomes. Justice does not always take the form a victim's family envisions. The gang-related homicide cases are particularly difficult to prosecute as witnesses are often terrified of testifying against the violent gang members. Witnesses then become hard to find or uncooperative presenting formidable challenges to prosecution. I have had many difficult meetings with victims' families over the last few years. Those conversations are among the hardest responsibilities of this profession. Families understandably want certainty and accountability. My responsibility is to explain candidly what the evidence can support and what justice is likely to require. Even when they disagree with the outcome, they deserve honesty, respect, and transparency.

I have maintained an open door policy with my team of prosecutors. I want them to feel free to discuss and collaborate on the cases they are handling. Recently, one of my younger prosecutors was working on a case and came to me with concerns about the confession of the defendant. The defendant had been a juvenile at the time. After reviewing the video of the confession, I concluded that our constitutional obligations required us to dismiss the prosecution, despite the impact this would have on the victim's family. Unfortunately, that confession was the primary evidence in the case. She and I arranged a meeting with the family and told them the State could not proceed with the prosecution. These are very difficult conversations, but those conversations cannot be avoided. We have taken an oath to uphold both the Tennessee and United States Constitutions. So we met this family with empathy and concern but also transparency and honesty about the situation at hand. While heartbroken that they would not get the justice they desired, they understood the State's decision.

I strive to work with professionalism. The Criminal Justice Center, known throughout the Memphis community as 201, is a world unto itself. On some days, we walk into that building carrying the weight of the world. These are serious, violent cases: families are watching, lives are at stake, and expectations on the attorneys handling them are immense. While television and movies often dramatize the adversarial nature of opposing counsel, I have found that being kind and courteous leads to much better outcomes for the victims I represent, as well as the citizens of Shelby County. I have developed many relationships over the years at 201 with all who work here— clerks, deputies, judges, defense attorneys. In my almost two decades of practice, I have learned that credibility is earned slowly through preparation, fairness, and professionalism. Those same qualities form the foundation of public confidence in the judiciary.

Shortly after coming back to the D.A.'s office in 2022, I was asked by a younger member of the gang unit to be second chair with him on an upcoming murder trial. It was a retaliatory gang shooting where the defendants actually shot at the wrong house. The residents and family and friends of the house where the shooting occurred were all out in the front yard for a celebration.

A six-year old child was killed as a result of the shooting. I came into the case just weeks before trial, well after all discovery was completed. We conducted pre-trials and prepared and reviewed the evidence for introduction at trial. One of the key pieces of evidence we intended to use at trial was a jailhouse informant. My co-counsel had previously interviewed the jailhouse informant. On the eve of trial, I discovered that my co-counsel had not disclosed the existence of this witness to the defense. Upon discovering this, I immediately made defense counsel aware of his existence. Further, I sent him all relevant materials from the state's file regarding this witness. Ultimately, this tragic case was resolved through a plea to a lesser included offense.

These experiences have reinforced that the law demands both firmness and humility: firmness in applying the law faithfully, and humility in recognizing that every decision affects real people whose confidence in the justice system depends upon being treated fairly.

10. List and describe all prior occasions on which you have submitted an application for any state or federal judicial position.

I submitted an application for a Federal Magistrate position in the Western District of Tennessee in 2020.

EDUCATION

11. List each college, law school, and other graduate school which you have attended, including dates of attendance, degree awarded, major, any form of recognition or other aspects of your education you believe are relevant, and your reason for leaving each school if no degree was awarded.

University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, August 1996-December 1999. Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*. I received a double major in Biology (3.4/4.0) and English (4.0/4.0).

Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee, August 2003-May 2006. I graduated in the top third of my class.

Alcorn State University, Summer 1997. I took some summer school classes.

University of Memphis, 2002-2003. I took some additional undergraduate course work after I graduated from University of Mississippi. I was considering applying to the Physical Therapy Program at the University of Tennessee and needed additional pre-requisite courses to make that application.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

October 14, 1977

13. How long have you lived continuously in the State of Tennessee?

I have lived here continuously since June 2000.

14. How long have you lived continuously in the county where you are now living?

I have lived in Shelby County since June 2000.

15. State the county in which you are registered to vote.

Shelby County

16. Describe your military service, if applicable, including branch of service, dates of active duty, rank at separation, and decorations, honors, or achievements. Please also state whether you received an honorable discharge and, if not, describe why not.

None.

17. Have you ever pled guilty or been convicted or are now on diversion for violation of any law, regulation or ordinance other than minor traffic offenses? If so, state the approximate date, charge and disposition of the case.

No.

18. To your knowledge, are you now under federal, state or local investigation for possible violation of a criminal statute or disciplinary rule? If so, give details.

No.

19. Please identify the number of formal complaints you have responded to that were filed against you with any supervisory authority, including but not limited to a court, a board of professional responsibility, or a board of judicial conduct, alleging any breach of ethics or unprofessional conduct by you. Please provide any relevant details on any such complaint if the complaint was not dismissed by the court or board receiving the complaint. You may wish to request a report from the appropriate supervisory authority (or authorities) for a

complete history.

A formal complaint with the Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility was filed against me after a referral to the BPR was made by the Office of Professional Responsibility of the Department of Justice. The BPR complaint, which related to my employment as an Assistant U.S. attorney was dismissed.

20. Has a tax lien or other collection procedure been instituted against you by federal, state, or local authorities or creditors within the last five (5) years? If so, give details.

No.

21. Have you ever filed bankruptcy (including personally or as part of any partnership, LLC, corporation, or other business organization)?

No.

22. Have you ever been a party in any legal proceedings (including divorces, domestic proceedings, and other types of proceedings)? If so, give details including the date, court and docket number and disposition. Provide a brief description of the case. This question does not seek, and you may exclude from your response, any matter where you were involved only as a nominal party, such as if you were the trustee under a deed of trust in a foreclosure proceeding.

I have been divorced twice.

Kenneth Harold Cox v. Melanie Headley Cox, Circuit of Shelby County, Tennessee, Div. IX, Docket #CT-4727-21. The divorce was granted on October 5, 2022, based on irreconcilable differences.

James Woodward Curry v. Melanie Headley Curry, Circuit Court of Shelby County, Tennessee, Div. VIII, Docket #CT-000104. The divorce was granted on April 27, 2011 based on irreconcilable differences.

23. List all organizations other than professional associations to which you have belonged within the last five (5) years, including civic, charitable, religious, educational, social and fraternal organizations. Give the titles and dates of any offices which you have held in such organizations.

I have been a member of WEVL (89.9/wevl.org) for approximately 25 years. WEVL is a 501(c)(3) independent, commercial free, member-supported radio station operating in Memphis since 1976. The mission of WEVL is to entertain and inform its audience through diverse music programming with an emphasis on the culture of Memphis and the South. For the last 16 years, I have been the on-air host of the show, River City Reveille, every Thursday morning from 6:00-8:00 a.m.

24. Have you ever belonged to any organization, association, club or society which limits its membership to those of any particular race, religion, or gender? Do not include in your answer those organizations specifically formed for a religious purpose, such as churches or synagogues.
- If so, list such organizations and describe the basis of the membership limitation.
 - If it is not your intention to resign from such organization(s) and withdraw from any participation in their activities should you be nominated and selected for the position for which you are applying, state your reasons.

While pursuing my undergraduate degree at the University of Mississippi, I was a member of the Kappa Delta Sorority. The sorority membership was limited to women only. I am no longer affiliated with this organization.

ACHIEVEMENTS

25. List all bar associations and professional societies of which you have been a member within the last ten years, including dates. Give the titles and dates of any offices which you have held in such groups. List memberships and responsibilities on any committee of professional associations which you consider significant.

Memphis Bar Association, 2022 to present

Leo Bearman, Sr. American Inn of Court, 2014-2017

Memphis Lawyer's Journal Club, 2016 to present

26. List honors, prizes, awards or other forms of recognition which you have received since your graduation from law school which are directly related to professional accomplishments.

Awarded Outstanding Barrister of the Year, 2016-2017, with the Leo Bearman, Sr. American Inn of Court

27. List any public office you have held or for which you have been candidate or applicant. Include the date, the position, and whether the position was elective or appointive.

I applied for the appointed position of Magistrate Judge in the Western District of Tennessee in 2020. I was not selected for this position.

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

28. What are your reasons for seeking this position? *(150 words or less)*

As a resident of Memphis and Shelby County for more than twenty-six years, I am deeply invested in this community and its future. I have also watched it struggle, and I believe much of that struggle is rooted in a justice system where not everyone is held to the standard their role demands. Investigators must follow the law. Prosecutors must seek justice, not just convictions. Defense attorneys must zealously represent their clients. Defendants must answer for their conduct. And judges must run courtrooms that are prepared, fair, and efficient. The victims of violent crime in particular deserve nothing less; they have already endured enough, and the system that handles their cases owes them its very best. I have spent most of my career as a public servant committed to that standard. From the bench, I intend to hold every part of that system to that standard, myself included.

29. Describe the judgeship you seek (i.e. geographic area, types of cases, number of judges, etc. and explain how your selection would impact the court. *(150 words or less)*

I am seeking appointment to one of the two newly created violent criminal court divisions under the Violent Crime Criminal Court Act.

Because I have spent years practicing before nearly every criminal court in this district, supervising high-volume dockets, and working closely with judges, attorneys, clerks, and law enforcement, I could assume these responsibilities immediately while maintaining continuity for the court and the litigants who appear before it. I have already sworn an oath to uphold the United States and Tennessee Constitutions and would carry that obligation forward as a judge.

Having practiced in these courts for years, I have seen firsthand how efficient case resolution matters to victims' families, who deserve closure, and to defendants, who deserve timely adjudication. I believe a commitment to efficiency and fairness is paramount, and I am prepared to deliver both.

30. Will you uphold the law even if you disagree with the substance of the law (e.g., statute or

rule) at issue? Give an example from your experience as a licensed attorney that supports your response to this question. *(250 words or less)*

Yes, I will uphold the laws of the United States and Tennessee as I have sworn to do. A judge's duty is to apply the law faithfully, not to substitute personal policy preferences for the decisions of the legislature. Throughout my career, both in state and in federal court, I have been required to prosecute a category of case with which I personally disagree— drug distribution resulting in death. In the State of Tennessee, this crime can be prosecuted as Second Degree Murder. There has recently been a change in the Tennessee law making it more in line with the federal statute on distribution resulting in death. I have prosecuted individuals who shared controlled substances with family members or close associates, people who were themselves drug users, only for those individuals to die of overdose. I understand the legislature's purpose in enacting the statute: addressing the devastating impact of heroin and fentanyl in our communities. In some cases, I have questioned whether the statute reaches what the legislature intended. Despite these reservations, I have faithfully prosecuted those cases because my responsibility is to enforce the law as enacted.

As a judge, my personal reservations about any particular statute would not alter my obligation to apply the law as written. If the law needs to change, that is the role of the legislature. Mine is to apply it faithfully.

REFERENCES

31. List five (5) persons, and their current positions and contact information, who would recommend you for the judicial position for which you are applying. Please list at least two persons who are not lawyers. Please note that the Commission or someone on its behalf may contact these persons regarding your application.

A. Honorable Judge Chris Craft, Criminal Court 8, Thirtieth Judicial District, [REDACTED]

B. Leslie Ballin, Criminal Defense Attorney, Ballin, Ballin & Fishman, [REDACTED]

C. Michael Keeney, Attorney, Of Counsel, Lewis Thomason, [REDACTED]

D. Michael Shearin, Inmate Disciplinary Oversight Board, State of Tennessee, [REDACTED]

E. Keith [REDACTED] & Andrew Rainer [REDACTED]

AFFIRMATION CONCERNING APPLICATION

Read, and if you agree to the provisions, sign the following:

I have read the foregoing questions and have answered them in good faith and as completely as my records and recollections permit. I hereby agree to be considered for nomination to the Governor for the office of Judge of the [Court] CRIMINAL COURT 30th JUDICIAL DISTRICT of Tennessee, and if appointed by the Governor, agree to serve that office. In the event any changes occur between the time this application is filed and the public hearing, I hereby agree to file an amended questionnaire with the Administrative Office of the Courts for distribution to the Commission members.

I understand that the information provided in this questionnaire shall be open to public inspection upon filing with the Administrative Office of the Courts and that the Commission may publicize the names of persons who apply for nomination and the names of those persons the Commission nominates to the Governor for the judicial vacancy in question.

Dated: July 12, 2026.

Signature



TENNESSEE TRIAL COURT VACANCY COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

511 UNION STREET, SUITE 600
NASHVILLE CITY CENTER
NASHVILLE, TN 37219