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Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office

3/4/26

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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 self-employed as a practicing attorney.

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

2009, BPR No. 028428.

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.

Tennessee, Active. Otherwise, I am admitted to the U.S. District Court for E.D. Tenn. (2011), U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals (2014), and U.S. Supreme Court (2025).

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 have been near-constantly employed since I was 15, aside from 4 semesters in college and my first year of law school. Before law school I had varied student-related employment, including governmental internships and Republican political campaigns. I worked as a Resident Assistant with the University of Tennessee Department of Housing, and I worked in several restaurants. Throughout this time, I occasionally worked with a friend performing landscaping-related services in a business we formed in high school.

Following my first year of law school I worked as a law clerk for Alan Everett, an attorney in general practice in Knoxville. (I was sometimes referred to as both a clerk and a paralegal.)

Midway through my second year of law school I changed employers, working as a law clerk for Brewer & Terry, P.C. in my hometown of Morristown. The caseload I assisted with

generally consisted of personal injury, civil rights litigation, medical malpractice, products liability, and premises liability. I continued in this role after taking the Bar Exam and before leaving to work for the University of Tennessee College of Law.

In Fall 2009, while awaiting Bar Exam results, I worked for the University of Tennessee College of Law as a Graduate Recruiter. In this role I was able to travel nationwide, attending law school admissions fairs and events. I also met with prospective students, spoke to college classes, coordinated with undergrad faculty at several institutions in order to recruit interested law students and mentor them regarding the admissions process. I also gave input to Admissions staff on trends and marketing associated with recruitment of prospective law students. I sometimes gave campus tours.

In November 2009 I began working as an Associate Attorney for Russell Kloosterman & Associates in Johnson City, Tennessee, which was largely a general practice. I worked for this firm for exactly one year.

In 2010 I started my own firm in my hometown of Morristown and have been continually and successfully self-employed since then. I rebranded my firm as "Lakeway Family Law" in 2023-24 to highlight my main practice area.

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.

For several years after founding my own practice, I worked as a true general practitioner, handling family law, criminal defense (state and federal), personal injury, bankruptcy, wills and estates, collections, and business-related matters. From my office in Morristown, I have generally covered all areas from Knoxville to the Tri-Cities. From 2012-2018 I served as City Attorney for Rutledge, Tennessee.

I began to narrow my practice in the late 2010's/early 2020's, as it became more administratively feasible to focus on family law. Most of my clients were coming to me for family law-related services, and existing criminal and probate caseloads were causing issues with scheduling. I rebranded my firm to "Lakeway Family Law" in late 2023/early 2024 and have generally practiced family law exclusively since. I am also a Rule 31-listed Family Mediator. I am aided by two regular employees and an intern.

At current, my practice is approximately 95% family-law related (and 5% miscellaneous/general practice), though I feel that I benefit greatly from having a broader skillset developed while working in many other fields of 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.

I am primarily a litigator, having practiced in front of 60-80 different Judges (including Administrative Law Judges, Special Masters, and Magistrates). I have handled matters in Juvenile Courts, General Sessions (Civil and Criminal), Circuit (Civil and Criminal), Chancery, U.S. Bankruptcy Court, U.S. District Court for Eastern District of Tennessee (Knoxville and Greeneville), The Tennessee Court of Appeals, The Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals, The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, and several other miscellaneous specialized tribunals. I have defeated multiple adverse applications for Tennessee Supreme Court Review, though I have not yet handled cases there in any other sense. I am admitted to the Bar of the United States Supreme Court but have not yet handled any cases there. I have handled all stages of civil trial and appeal. I have handled cases in 19 Tennessee counties from my recollection.

Outside of litigation, I have successfully handled numerous personal injury matters without having filed suit. I have also worked to help non-client parties and attorneys settle cases as a Rule 31-listed Family Law Mediator. I have participated in numerous pro-bono and other specialized legal clinics. I helped found a (former) bi-monthly legal clinic for Hamblen County with other attorneys and have traveled to participate in other pro bono efforts.

Otherwise, I have performed transactional work such as drafting of wills and other end-of-life documents, powers of attorney, deeds, contracts, prenuptial agreements, and I have advised organizations on various legal matters when requested.

As a Rutledge City Attorney, I was responsible for advising the Mayor, City Council, and various department officers regarding ordinance issues and violations, land/property disputes, and various contracts that the city was a party to, as well as representing the city's interests in Municipal Court.

All told I would estimate having handled approximately 2,400-2,500 legal matters in my career and having consulted with clients and prospective clients on countless others.

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

Re The M.C.S. Revocable Trust [redacted], Cocke Co. Chancery Court 2017-CV-22 (2017-21): This case involved a multi-year, multi-prong challenge to a high-value out-of-state revocable trust and its administration after the death of the settlor. The case involved extensive, multi-state discovery efforts, a summary judgment phase, a phase heard by a Special Master, a subsequent review by the Chancery Court, and a phase involving the calculation and award of attorney fees. I represented two separate Petitioners from filing to conclusion, and my clients were awarded a substantial judgment with all attorney's fees and costs being due from Respondent, which resulted in judgment liens being placed. I include this case to demonstrate some of my history in general practice, understanding of the legal issues involving undue influence claims, and my history and experience with complex litigation.

U.S. v. Vestal, 716 Fed. Appx. 512 (6th Cir. 2017): I was appointed to represent an indigent defendant in this matter. This case involved what I respectfully argued to constitute ex parte judicial fact-finding. Though this appeal was not successful, I include this case to demonstrate my commitment to exploring all issues and avenues for relief as well as to demonstrate my understanding of the proper bounds of judicial fact-finding as developed from research. This was an indigent appointment.

U.S. v. Dibiase, 2:19CR146 (E.D. Tenn. 2019): I was appointed to represent an indigent defendant in this matter. In this brief federal firearms case (felon in possession) I was able to persuade the U.S. Attorney's Office to dismiss its indictment with prejudice after I discovered authority and presented argument demonstrating that my client's previous "felony" resulted from an arcane sentencing scheme in another state and was not actually a federally-defined felony. I include this to demonstrate my commitment to working expeditiously, paying attention to detail, statutory analysis, and communicating authoritatively and respectfully. (My involvement in the case lasted just under two weeks.) I was appointed to represent an indigent defendant in this matter.

In re Alexis S., E2018-01989-COA-R3-PT (Tenn. Ct. App. 2019): In this matter, I was able to successfully appeal a termination of my client's parental rights based largely on evidence that was not properly admitted by the Trial Court, highlighting my understanding of/commitment to proper evidentiary procedure at trial and in the record.

Ronning v. Ronning, E2024-00437-COA-R3-CV (Tenn. Ct. App. 2025): This recent appeal successfully capped a multi-year divorce matter involving issues of property division, residential parenting, and alimony, demonstrating my dedication to my clients, finality, and my experience with complex family law litigation.

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

I have been heavily involved with Legal Aid of East Tennessee for much of my time in private practice. (I served as President of its Board of Directors from 2022 to 2024. More information on this role is discussed below in Par. 23.)

I was previously active on the Criminal Justice Act Panel for the Eastern District of Tennessee, where I handled approximately 50-60 federal criminal matters from 2011-2023. I handled cases in the Greeneville and Knoxville Divisions and handled appeals to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.

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

N/A.

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 Tennessee College of Law, 2006-09

- Robert W. Ritchie Scholarship Award for commitment to public service
- W.K. McClure Fellowship for International Studies (used to study International Trade Law and Comparative Corporate Governance in Brazil at Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro)
- Student Attorney-University of Tennessee Legal Clinic
- 3rd Year Editor-Tennessee Journal of Law and Policy
- “Jury Master” at 2009 Summers-Wyatt Symposium: Asking Jurors to do the Impossible (monitored simulated jury deliberations with hypothetical jury instructions and presented findings and observations to conference attendees)
- Authored “School Funding Initiatives, Accountability, and Litigation in Tennessee: *Lowry* to BEP 2.0,” expository writing project chronicling historical relationship between educational funding and litigation in Tennessee

University of Tennessee College of Business Administration, 2002-06

- Received Bicentennial Scholarship (four-year, full tuition and fee award) based on high school academic excellence (GPA and ACT)
- Four-year University Honors Scholar. Senior Project: “Advocacy Issues in Gifted Education,” available online at https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/946/.
- Member, Knoxville Affairs Committee of Student Government Association
- Vice President-College Republicans, Statewide Organization and University Chapters

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

██████████ 984.

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

Since birth.

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

I have lived in Hamblen County continually and exclusively since mid-2015. Before that I briefly resided in Grainger County, and I attended college and law school in Knox County, where I resided on or near campus. I moved to Hamblen County (from Campbell County, Tennessee) at age 10.

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

Hamblen 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.

N/A.

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.

Yes. In spring 2004 and during the last days of my sophomore year in college (age 19) I received written citations from University Police for ordinance violations (underage alcohol consumption/possession (2 counts), and disorderly conduct). I did not contest them, electing to complete a diversion-type unsupervised probationary period, after which the matter was expunged by the Knoxville City Court.

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.

I have responded to two formal BPR Complaints:

1. In May 2013 I received a complaint from an adult son of an older divorce client. The son claimed to have a General Power of Attorney form from another jurisdiction that allowed him to participate in his mother's divorce action, which was being mediated. However, neither the mediator, myself, or my client found circumstances by which to invoke the Power of Attorney and we thus proceeded to work to settle the case without his involvement (and were successful in reaching a very favorable settlement). This caused the client's son to file a board complaint approximately one week later. I responded accordingly and the complaint was quickly dismissed.
2. In October 2024 I received a complaint from a former client who claimed to have been misled regarding some discovery-related correspondences and deadlines sent to opposing counsel. The most severe claim she made was essentially that the "sent" times on emails demonstrated that emails could not have been sent in a particular sequence and that I was thus misleading her about her case status. However, I was able to produce the emails and demonstrate that the former client's residency in another part of the country and in another time zone had impacted the times being displayed on her side of the forwarded/copied messages. (The times of numerous intra-hour discovery-related emails were in dispute.) She otherwise complained regarding the written discovery process in her case, however her claims were again easily refuted with the exhaustive relevant communication history. This complaint was also quickly dismissed.

A copy of a recent Attorney Disciplinary History is included herewith, confirming these dismissals. (I was required to obtain this in relation to my application for admission to the U.S. Supreme Court in Fall 2025.)

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.

2013-Hamblen Co. Sessions Court No. 2013-CV-687. In this matter an unsatisfied former client sued me *pro se* in General Sessions Court (i.e. "small claims court") for a list of unique "laundry-list" styled claims arising from my time spent handling his divorce action. (The former client had also contacted both opposing counsel and the Trial Judge, ex parte, making threats against them regarding his plight, and he had contacted a fee dispute committee from another County's Bar Association as well.) A Judge was assigned from another part of the state due to perceived local conflicts. I was confident that this filing lacked merit and thus elected to waive pre-trial litigation and proceeded to trial to have the action expeditiously heard, where it was dismissed at the conclusion of Plaintiff's proof.

I have otherwise been only a nominal party in at least two matters where I had agreed to act as Administrator ad Litem, etc.

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 the Board of Directors for Legal Aid of East Tennessee since approximately 2014. I served as President of the Board from 2022-2024 and served as Secretary prior to serving as President. During my tenure the organization had approximately 75 employees and six standing offices in the 26-county coverage area. We temporarily opened an Eviction Prevention Office in Knoxville as well. I made it a point to personally visit every office (from Chattanooga to Johnson City) and engage with staff, and I kept an "open door" policy for any issues that anyone felt should have been brought to my attention. Prior to serving as President, I was also asked to hear client grievances filed with the organization's grievance committee. Grievances were limited; however, I can recall one claim where I directed that we take evidentiary-type statements, apply the respective regulation and organization policy, and issue findings and recommendations, following a judicial model.

I am a member of First Baptist Church Morristown. I have served as an Adult Small Group/Bible Study Leader (i.e. Sunday School Teacher) for approximately 10 years. My group members are adults ranging in age from their mid-30's to late 40's/early 50's. From 2021-2025 I served on the Personnel Committee (regarding employment-related matters for the Church's 35+ employees). I served as the Committee's Secretary from 2023-2025.

I have been involved with the Hamblen County Republican Party throughout much of my life. I served as its Chairman from 2017-2019. During my tenure we opened our first permanent headquarters (securing donated retail space), updated bylaws in accordance with TRP mandates, moved to remote Executive Committee meetings for simplified scheduling and attendance (pre-Covid), and had several profitable and widely attended fundraising events. We enjoyed great participation and grassroots involvement during my tenure. To my

recollection, all partisan public offices in Hamblen County were won/held by Republicans at all times during my tenure and all state and federal races saw Republican candidates winning with over 70% of the vote in our county. I have regularly remained available as Party Counsel, an informally-assigned role. I have also served as an Associate Member of Hamblen County Republican Women (note: men are named Associate Members in this organization).

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.

During my youth I was involved with Boy Scouts of America, which was then gender-based. I am no longer involved with scouting.

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.

Tennessee Bar Association, 2009-present. I am currently a member of the TBA Board of Governors and House of Delegates (3rd Judicial District Delegate). I have served on various committees and have been a member of several of the association's sections as part of my membership and service.

Hamblen County Bar Association, 2010-present. I served as President in 2023. During my tenure I organized a CLE luncheon at a private clubhouse with an informative presentation from Russell Fowler, Esq., a well-known Chattanooga-based attorney and legal historian.

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.

2015-Outstanding Service to Clients Award, Legal Aid of East Tennessee (recognizing pro

bono accomplishments and service).

2025-Nominee-People's Choice of the Lakeway Area (Citizen Tribune).

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.

2012-2018 City Attorney, Rutledge, Tennessee (elected/appointed by City Council).

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

I am applying because I believe that what we do in our courts today will have an impact well into the next century and beyond. How we address new conflicts, challenges, and even new technologies (like AI and e-filing) will set a tone for years to come.

After a recent court appearance on a parentage/visitation matter, I told the (new) parents and their families (with opposing counsel) that, not only had they had a child and grandchild, but that they were being tasked with raising a future parent and grandparent. Perhaps that wasn't a "bulldog" moment, but that's exactly how I've begun to view our responsibility to the future, and I felt that everyone needed to hear it at the time.

Some people view courts as a tool for settling scores. This is not entirely accurate. We have our justice system to protect our future. What we do today matters.

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)*

This district covers Hamblen, Hawkins, Greene, and Hancock Counties. According to the AOC's Annual Statistical Reports for FY 2023-25, approximately 75-80% of the district's filings for these two years were family law related (with remaining cases falling in other miscellaneous categories). (<https://www.tncourts.gov/media/statistical-reports>.)

There are 3 (Civil) Circuit Court Judges. (Criminal Court is a separate entity.) The district has a dedicated Child Support Magistrate who initially handles filings involving the Child Support Enforcement Office of the District Attorney General ("IV-D Cases"). The Clerks in these four counties must divide their efforts between Circuit Civil, Criminal, General Sessions, and Juvenile Courts, making respect for these offices imperative.

With nearly 8 in 10 cases involving domestic relations, my heavy focus in that field and understanding of its issues (along with my history in general practice) would allow for a seamless transition so that this Court may continue to resolve its cases expeditiously.

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 always uphold the law, with ease. I believe the civil law is a product of representative democracy and thus generally reflects our societal values. I believe it is often misinterpretation and/or misapplication of the law that invites much controversy, as convenient or self-serving interpretations of law can appear.

For example, I recently encountered some vagueness in recent adoption legislative amendments. I enjoy statutory interpretation and I have gone as far as watching legislative committee videos to discern legislative intent when the issue has arisen, so I did that here. I even personally asked an involved legislator for their understanding and even reviewed news coverage for interviews or hints of what the legislative intent was in the given issue. The results of my research helped me resolve the issue in the case I was handling at the time; however, a more liberalized interpretation could have been argued to justify filing termination and adoption matters in courts that were more convenient for my clients than their opponents. Essentially, where a more convenient interpretation could have been argued for my clients (and thus, my interests in their cases), I instead advocated, after thorough research, that such an interpretation was likely inappropriate.

These may not be exercises that I could specifically continue in every instance as Circuit Judge, but I highlight them to show my respect for the idea that legislation is to be properly interpreted and respected unless and until constitutional challenges are successful.

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. Dr. Dean Haun, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church Morristown. [REDACTED]

B. Dr. Rebecca Campbell, former VP TCAT-Morristown. [REDACTED]

C. Steve Terry, Esq., Attorney. [REDACTED]

D. Kay Solomon Armstrong, Esq., Attorney/Adjunct Faculty (Carson Newman University). [REDACTED]

E. Dr. Brandon Byrd, Veterinarian/Farmer, [REDACTED]

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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 Circuit Court, Third 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: March 17, 2026.

 #28425

Signature