Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission

Application for Nomination to Judicial Office

1/17/23

Name: Keeda J. Haynes

Office Address: 2013 25th Ave N

(including county) Nashville, TN 37208 (Davidson County)

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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.

Senior Legal Counsel at Free Hearts

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

2012, TN Bar No. 031518

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 – 031518 – Date of Licensure 2012 - Active

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).

Since completing my legal education, I have held several roles that reflect my deep commitment to justice, public service, and community advocacy.

Work related to the practice of law.

Assistant Public Defender, Metropolitan Nashville Public Defender's Office
I began my legal career as an Assistant Public Defender, where I represented indigent individuals charged with criminal offenses at every stage of the judicial process—from

arraignment and preliminary hearings to trial, sentencing, and appeal. I managed a diverse and demanding caseload that spanned both misdemeanors and serious felony charges, requiring not only legal skill but compassion, diligence, and a deep commitment to the constitutional principle of equal justice under law.

In this role, I drafted and litigated complex motions, negotiated plea agreements, conducted legal research, and advocated before both juries and judges. I built meaningful and trusting attorney-client relationships, often serving as the only consistent advocate for clients facing the full weight of the criminal legal system. I also provided critical counsel on the often-overlooked collateral consequences of a conviction, including the lasting effects on employment, housing, education, and civil rights.

Beyond the courtroom, I was deeply involved in community education, outreach initiatives, and reform efforts aimed at reducing recidivism and increasing access to justice for those disproportionately harmed by the system. This work was not only professionally formative—it was personal. It deepened my resolve to pursue justice with integrity and humanity and laid the foundation for my enduring commitment to equity and fairness in the criminal legal system. These experiences continue to inform my perspective and approach as I seek to serve in a judicial capacity.

Senior Legal Counsel, Free Hearts (Current Position)
As Senior Legal Counsel at Free Hearts, I lead the organization's legal and policy advocacy efforts with a focus on criminal justice reform and voting rights restoration. I advocate for the restoration of voting rights for formerly incarcerated individuals across Tennessee, a process that often requires navigating complex legal and administrative barriers. I have assisted many individuals in petitioning for the restoration of their citizenship rights, including direct legal representation, drafting and filing motions, and compiling supporting documents for the motions.

I also review, draft, and analyze legislation with an emphasis on its legal and social impact, particularly for low-income and justice-involved communities. I regularly provide expert testimony before Tennessee legislative committees, helping shape state policy on issues ranging from voting rights to sentencing reform. I develop and implement strategic campaigns—such as the Free the Vote campaign—to educate communities and mobilize support around key justice initiatives.

Additionally, I support families impacted by incarceration by offering legal guidance and helping them navigate the court system. I work in close collaboration with stakeholders including lawmakers, grassroots organizers, national coalitions, and legal experts to build comprehensive reform strategies. My work at Free Hearts is grounded in both professional expertise and lived experience, allowing me to center the voices of directly impacted individuals in all areas of advocacy.

Work unrelated to the practice of law.

Federal Policy Analyst
As a Federal Policy Analyst, I monitored, analyzed, and influenced federal criminal justice policy with a focus on centering the needs and voices of directly impacted communities. I conducted in-depth legal and policy analysis of federal legislation, and agency actions related to sentencing, incarceration, reentry, and civil rights.

In this role, I also engaged directly with members of Congress, federal agencies, and national advocacy coalitions to advance reform measures aimed at dismantling systemic inequities in the criminal legal system. I drafted and delivered testimony for congressional hearings and policy briefings, translating complex legal concepts into actionable recommendations rooted in both data and lived experience.

Serving as a critical liaison between grassroots organizations and federal decision-makers, I ensured that the perspectives of those most affected by incarceration and disenfranchisement were not only represented but prioritized in policy development. My work bridged the gap between community advocacy and federal policymaking, helping to shape a more just and inclusive legislative agenda at the national level.

Voting Rights Campaign Strategist
In my role as Voting Rights Campaign Strategist at The Sentencing Project, I led national efforts to dismantle felony disenfranchisement laws and advance universal voting rights for justice-impacted individuals. I partnered with grassroots organizations, directly impacted leaders, and policy coalitions across multiple states—including Illinois, Oregon, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Tennessee—to develop and execute targeted legislative and public education campaigns.

I provided strategic guidance to state-based coalitions on legal research, bill drafting, legislative engagement, and movement building. My work included preparing detailed policy briefs, conducting legal analysis, and ensuring campaign strategies were community-centered and equity-driven. I regularly drafted and delivered legislative testimony, facilitated advocacy trainings for community leaders, and spoke at public hearings and press conferences as a national expert on felony disenfranchisement and voting rights restoration.

Additionally, I helped coordinate national programming around Voting Rights Month and Second Chance Month, elevating the voices of directly impacted individuals and helping to shape the national narrative around citizenship, democracy, and inclusion.

Congressional Candidate, Committee to Elect Keeda Haynes
I was a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives in Tennessee's 5th Congressional District, running on a platform centered around criminal justice reform, equitable healthcare access, voting rights, and economic justice. I developed a comprehensive and community-informed policy agenda that addressed the systemic barriers facing underserved populations.

In leading a full-scale campaign operation, I managed a diverse team of staff and consultants, oversaw strategic communications, fundraising, and voter outreach, and built broad-based

coalitions across labor, faith-based, grassroots, and justice advocacy groups. Through public forums, debates, media engagement, and direct voter contact, I elevated critical conversations about mass incarceration, felony disenfranchisement, and structural inequality—issues too often absent from mainstream political discourse.

My campaign not only galvanized support across the district but also helped shift long-standing narratives about who is qualified to lead and whose voices are too often excluded from policymaking. As a formerly incarcerated Black woman, my candidacy challenged the stigma surrounding justice-impacted individuals and affirmed that those who have been directly harmed by the system are not only capable of leading, but uniquely positioned to do so with insight, accountability, and purpose. By centering the lived experiences of directly impacted people in the political arena, the campaign demonstrated the power of transformative leadership—rooted in resilience, informed by experience, and committed to building a government that reflects the full diversity of the communities it serves.

Author

I am the author of *Bending the Arc: My Journey from Prison to Politics*, a memoir that chronicles my path from incarceration to becoming a licensed attorney, public defender, and nationally recognized advocate for justice reform. The book offers a deeply personal account of the barriers faced by those impacted by the criminal legal system and challenges the stigma that continues to silence their voices. Through this work, I aimed to humanize those most impacted by mass incarceration, illuminate the systemic failures within the justice system, and demonstrate the power of resilience and redemption in spite of these failures.

Bending the Arc has been widely utilized as a tool in civic education, criminal justice programming, reentry initiatives, and advocacy training across the country. It has also served as a foundation for keynote addresses, panel discussions, and community dialogues—sparking critical conversations about justice, accountability, and leadership by those who have lived the experience.

My work across each of these roles reflects a consistent and unwavering commitment to justice, community empowerment, and legal integrity—the very principles that must guide a fair and impartial judiciary. Whether advocating in the courtroom, shaping public policy, or engaging with lawmakers, I have remained focused on ensuring that those most impacted by the legal system are not only heard but understood. That perspective is essential on the bench. As a judge, I would carry forward that same commitment—applying the law with impartiality, while never losing sight of the real human lives affected by every decision made in a courtroom.

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.

Voting rights restoration – 50% - My current voting rights restoration work is deeply rooted in direct legal representation, legislative advocacy, and systemic reform aimed at removing barriers for individuals with felony convictions seeking to regain citizenship rights in Tennessee.

This work has evolved significantly in response to recent legislative changes, requiring a more intensive and litigation-focused approach.

Prior to the recent change in the law, Tennessee provided an administrative process that allowed eligible individuals to restore their voting rights without having to go to court. Under that system, I assisted hundreds of formerly incarcerated individuals in navigating a multi-step process involving coordination with the Department of Correction, local election commissions, and clerks' offices. I helped clients obtain Certificates of Restoration (COR), guided them through eligibility determinations, and addressed common barriers such as unresolved court debt, incomplete records, or conflicting agency information. I worked closely with community partners to pay off outstanding court costs where needed and engaged in public education efforts through community workshops and direct outreach.

Following the enactment of the 2023 and 2025 legislative changes, the rights restoration process in Tennessee shifted dramatically. Individuals are now required to petition the court to restore their citizenship rights—eliminating the previous administrative pathway. In response to this shift, my work now centers on litigation. I represent individuals in Circuit Courts across Tennessee by drafting and filing petitions for restoration of rights, gathering and submitting supporting documentation—including proof of discharge from supervision, payment or waiver of restitution and court costs, and the provision of evidence of compliance with child support obligations. I frequently appear before judges throughout the state to argue the merits of individual petitions and to ensure that the law is applied fairly and consistently, especially in light of new statutory language and evolving judicial interpretations.

This work is not only legally complex but also deeply personal. Many of the individuals I represent have long histories of disenfranchisement and face systemic obstacles to reentry. I take great care to center their dignity and agency throughout the legal process. My role often extends beyond courtroom advocacy to educating clients and the community about what full restoration of rights entails.

Through this work, I remain committed to expanding access to the ballot, confronting unjust barriers to civic participation, and ensuring that the courts do not merely interpret the law but administer it with fairness, transparency, and humanity.

Federal litigation – 5% - As co-counsel in a complex voting rights federal lawsuit, *Tennessee Conference of the NAACP et al. v. Lee et al., Case No. 3:20-cv-01039*, I represent the Tennessee Conference of the NAACP and a class of felony-impacted individuals in challenging the state's restrictive voting rights restoration system. I conduct legal research, draft complex pleadings, and develop class certification strategies.

Criminal – 5% - I provide limited representation in misdemeanor cases, particularly for individuals who are indigent or facing charges that may carry lasting impacts beyond the immediate sentence. My approach emphasizes both legal defense and education, ensuring that clients fully understand the implications of any plea or conviction and are empowered to make informed decisions about their cases.

Lobbying/Advocacy – 40% - In my current role, I serve as a registered lobbyist in the state of Tennessee, where I focus on advancing legislation related to voting rights restoration, criminal justice reform, and the broader dismantling of barriers faced by justice-impacted communities. My work spans direct legislative engagement, policy development, coalition building, and community education.

I review, analyze, and draft legislation, paying close attention to statutory language, legal implications, and the lived impact on marginalized populations. I regularly meet with state legislators and their staff to advocate for certain bills. This includes one-on-one lobbying meetings, as well as participation in broader coalition efforts to influence legislative priorities.

I also testify before legislative committees in support or opposition to proposed legislation and frequently draft testimony for community partners and impacted individuals, helping ensure their voices are represented in the policy process. Beyond the Capitol, I work to educate lawmakers on the real-world consequences of legal and policy decisions, providing both legal context and community-centered narratives that inform their understanding.

Additionally, I engage with a wide network of stakeholders, community organizations, and advocacy coalitions to coordinate strategy, share legislative updates, and mobilize grassroots support. I conduct community education workshops and briefings to ensure directly impacted individuals and their advocates are equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to participate in the legislative process.

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.

Trial Courts

My trial court experience is both extensive and substantive built through my service as an Assistant Public Defender in Nashville and expanded through my current work advocating for voting rights restoration under Tennessee's newly implemented court-based system. As an Assistant Public Defender for the Metropolitan Nashville Public Defender's Office, I represented hundreds of indigent clients charged with offenses ranging from misdemeanor trespassing and drug possession to serious felonies such as murder, robbery and aggravated assault. I handled cases from the earliest stages—advising clients at initial appearance and bond hearings--through preliminary hearings, pretrial motions, plea negotiations, trial, and post-sentencing advocacy. I conducted jury and bench trials, managing all aspects of trial preparation and courtroom litigation: jury selection, opening and closing arguments, direct and cross-examination of witnesses, evidentiary objections, and submission of jury instructions. I successfully argued numerous motions to suppress based on constitutional violations, and handled sentencing hearings where I developed detailed mitigation presentations to secure outcomes other than incarceration. My practice was holistic: I worked closely with social workers, mental health professionals, and reentry organizations to address the root causes of clients' criminal-legal involvement. I also engaged with families and community networks to

help build support plans for clients. My work included ongoing education of clients about collateral consequences of conviction—such as voting restrictions, public housing ineligibility, and employment barriers—which informed my broader commitment to systemic reform. Outside the courtroom, I frequently led community presentations and legal clinics on criminal justice topics, helping residents understand their rights and court processes.

My current work in trial courts is focused on representing individuals seeking the restoration of their citizenship rights—most notably, the right to vote—following changes in Tennessee law that shifted the restoration process from an administrative framework to a court-based one. I serve as counsel in these proceedings, which take place in circuit courts across the state. I draft and file petitions, ensuring legal sufficiency under Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-101 et seq., and gather all required supporting documentation, such as proof of completion of sentence, satisfaction or waiver of court costs payment of restitution, and compliance with child support obligations.

Once a petition is filed, I coordinate with the court clerk's office to ensure all relevant parties—typically the District Attorney General and the Attorney General's Office—receive proper service, and I respond to any objections that may arise. These cases have frequently required me to litigate contested issues of eligibility, where I have been successful in several courts in restoring voting rights in these cases. I conduct legal research, draft briefs, and responses to objections, and appear before judges to present oral argument and advocate for my clients' constitutional and statutory rights.

In addition to courtroom advocacy, I also maintain ongoing communication with my clients to prepare them for hearings and ensure that they fully understand the legal process and what to expect.

This work not only demands trial advocacy skills but also the ability to navigate intersecting areas of criminal and civil law simultaneously.

Appellate Courts

While I did not serve as lead counsel on direct appeals, I played a critical role in preserving and protecting appellate rights throughout my litigation practice. As an Assistant Public Defender, I routinely advised clients on their appellate rights and worked to ensure that all appealable issues were properly preserved during trial and pretrial proceedings. I collaborated with appellate counsel when necessary to provide trial records, legal theories, and context for complex constitutional or evidentiary questions raised on appeal.

In one notable case, I negotiated a conditional plea agreement that allowed my client to preserve a dispositive legal issue for appeal. This required a detailed understanding of Tennessee Rule of Criminal Procedure 37(b), which governs conditional pleas and appellate waivers. I ensured that the record clearly reflected the preserved issue, and that the plea agreement met the procedural requirements for appellate review. This experience highlighted the importance of strategic thinking, attention to appellate procedure, and protecting a client's long-term legal interests—even in the context of negotiated resolutions.

Throughout trial proceedings, I was diligent in preserving appellate issues by filing and litigating motions to suppress, objecting to improper evidentiary rulings, challenging prosecutorial conduct, and ensuring that constitutional arguments were raised and fully developed in the record. This included detailed oral arguments, written motions, and trial objections that safeguarded a client's ability to seek relief from a higher court when necessary.

My experience reflects a thorough understanding of the appellate process and its importance in protecting due process, correcting legal error, and ensuring constitutional integrity within the judicial system.

Legislative Bodies

As Senior Legal Counsel at Free Hearts and a registered lobbyist in Tennessee, I lead the organization's legislative strategy on criminal justice reform, with a particular emphasis on voting rights restoration, sentencing reform, and decarceration. I review, analyze, and draft legislation, engage with lawmakers, provide legal analysis to legislators and their staff, and draft and deliver expert testimony in committee hearings.

At the state level, I have worked extensively with the Tennessee General Assembly to expand the state's voting rights restoration laws. Most recently, I helped lead the policy strategy that resulted in the Senate passing Tennessee's first expansion of voting rights access ever. This bill eliminates the requirement that individuals pay court costs as part of the voting rights restoration process. My work on the bill included drafting legislation and amendments, negotiating bill language, coordinating with coalition partners, and preparing directly impacted individuals to testify before legislative committees. I have also testified personally in multiple hearings, offering both legal analysis and the perspective of someone directly affected by the criminal legal system.

At the federal level, I provided both oral and written testimony before the U.S. House Oversight Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on the issue of federal marijuana reform. My testimony addressed the disproportionate impact of federal marijuana laws on Black and Brown communities, the collateral consequences of marijuana convictions—including barriers to employment, housing, and voting—and the urgent need for equitable policy change in marijuana enforcement and sentencing. This testimony was entered into the congressional record and contributed to the broader federal dialogue on marijuana decriminalization and racial justice.

As the Voting Rights Campaign Strategist for The Sentencing Project, I directed and supported state-based legislative campaigns across Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Oregon, and Massachusetts. I worked with local and national coalitions to develop policy strategy, draft legislation, and advise on effective advocacy, including how to prepare for hearings and lobby legislators. I regularly facilitated advocacy trainings, strategic planning sessions, and coalition convenings, helping community partners build legislative power grounded in lived experience.

My legislative work also includes educating attorneys, directly impacted advocates, and the broader public on how to read, track, and influence legislation. I have developed and led legal advocacy trainings across the country, with a focus on increasing civic participation and policy literacy in marginalized communities.

Whether I am advising a legislator on a bill's unintended consequences, training a formerly incarcerated advocate to testify, or presenting formal legal analysis at a congressional forum, I approach legislative forums with the same commitment to accuracy, transparency, and justice that I bring to the courtroom.

Administrative Bodies

Before Tennessee's 2025 statutory change that shifted voting rights restoration into the judicial system, I led many individuals through the administrative process for restoring voting rights. This work involved guiding clients in completing and submitting Certificates of Restoration to local election commissions and navigating complex agency requirements through the Tennessee Department of Correction and local and out of state court clerks and interpreting evolving eligibility criteria.

My advocacy extended beyond individual representation. I developed strong working relationships with court and corrections officials across the state, pushed for consistency and transparency in the process, and trained communities across the state on how to effectively use the administrative pathway to voting rights restoration. I also partnered with community groups to help pay off fines and fees, ensuring that indigency did not serve as a barrier to accessing the ballot box.

In addition to my state-level work, I have contributed to federal administrative advocacy on criminal justice reform. I drafted and submitted formal recommendations to the United States Sentencing Commission regarding its proposed policy priorities, particularly emphasizing racial disparities in sentencing and the long-term impacts of mandatory minimums. I also authored a report and recommendation to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, urging implementation of a Presidential Executive Order expanding access to voting for incarcerated individuals in federal facilities. This included legal research on federal statutory authority and best practices for implementing civic engagement programs in correctional settings.

These experiences across both state and federal administrative bodies reflect my commitment to systemic reform.

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

While serving as a public defender, I represented a client who had struggled with severe substance use disorder for most of her life. Her involvement with the criminal legal system began as a juvenile and continued well into adulthood, marked by cycles of incarceration, instability, and unaddressed trauma. During the course of my representation of her, we developed a strong and trusting attorney-client relationship—something she told me she had never experienced before. In our conversations, she opened up about deeply personal

experiences and expressed a sincere desire to break free from the cycle and seek treatment again, despite multiple unsuccessful attempts in the past.

Recognizing the urgency and potential in her willingness to try again, I worked closely with the social workers in our office to secure her placement in a treatment program. I maintained regular communication with her during her time in recovery, offering not just legal support, but consistent encouragement and accountability. After completing the program, she wrote me a heartfelt card thanking me for believing in her when she didn't believe in herself. She said that while she had had many attorneys, I was the first who treated her like more than a case file—someone who cared about her future and her dignity.

What was most meaningful to me was that, long after her case had ended, she continued to send me updates—cards letting me know she was still sober, still rebuilding her life, and still grateful. That experience reaffirmed for me that advocacy rooted in compassion and human connection can have lasting impact far beyond the courtroom.

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

In addition to direct litigation, policy work, and courtroom advocacy, I have extensive experience in public legal education, training, and thought leadership that spans local, state, and national platforms. I have served as a trusted legal voice on issues at the intersection of criminal justice and civil rights, particularly voting rights restoration, racial disparities, and the long-term consequences of incarceration.

A key part of my legal work has included training other attorneys on voting rights restoration. I have led sessions designed to equip lawyers with the legal knowledge and procedural tools to assist individuals seeking to restore their rights in Tennessee, especially in light of recent changes in the law that now require court petitions. These trainings emphasize not only technical legal procedures but also the broader civic and societal significance of restoring full citizenship rights.

I have also conducted trainings for public defenders and federal public defenders focused on criminal justice reform, collateral consequences of convictions, and the racial impact of prosecutorial and sentencing practices. These presentations were specifically tailored to help attorneys recognize the broader social and systemic implications of their advocacy and to integrate a holistic approach into their defense strategies. My work in this area has contributed to better-informed legal practices and strengthened the capacity of the defense bar to serve clients with dignity and effectiveness.

Beyond trainings, I have delivered dozens of lectures, keynote addresses, and panel presentations on criminal justice reform, voting rights, and mass incarceration to audiences that include judges, law students, policymakers, academics, faith leaders, and directly impacted individuals. These engagements have taken place at legal conferences, national summits,

academic institutions, and advocacy forums. Through this work, from conferences at Yale Law School and the Cato Institute, I have helped bridge the gap between legal institutions and the communities they serve, while also shaping public understanding of systemic inequities in the criminal legal system.

Recently, I was appointed by the Tennessee Supreme Court as a member of the Disciplinary Hearing Committee for District 5. The work of this committee is to hear cases involving disciplinary complaints against lawyers.

This body of experience demonstrates my ability not only to apply the law but to educate, mentor, and lead others in the pursuit of a more just and equitable legal system.

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

Not Applicable

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.

Tennessee State University, 2002
Bachelor of Arts and Science in Criminal Justice

Nashville School of Law, 2012
Juris Doctor

Stetson University, 2017
LL.M., Trial Advocacy

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

June 29[redacted]

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

Almost 47 years, except for the time that I was in federal prison for almost four years in

Alderson, West Virginia. Since my release from prison, I have continuously lived in Tennessee for 19 years.

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

19 years

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

Davidson 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.

Not applicable

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. On March 7, 2001, I was indicted in the Middle District of Tennessee, along with 28 other individuals on various marijuana conspiracy charges. I maintained my innocence and proceeded to trial in April of 2002. After a five-day jury trial, I was acquitted of all charges except aiding and abetting a conspiracy to distribute 100-400kgs of marijuana. This carried a five-year mandatory minimum sentence. In September of 2002, as a first-time offender, I was sentenced to seven years in federal prison. I reported to start serving this sentence on January 6, 2003, two weeks after graduating from Tennessee State University. After several years of appeals, including to the United States Supreme Court, in May of 2005, I was eventually resentenced to the mandatory minimum of five years. I was released on December 1, 2006, after serving almost four years.

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.

None

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)?

Yes.

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.

Keeda J. Haynes, Case No. 3:01-bk-06410. I filed a Chapter 13 bankruptcy petition on June 5, 2001. The Bankruptcy Court confirmed and approved my plan for repayment of my creditors on July 24, 2001. The plan required that I pay $15,800 over 45 months. After being found guilty and having to report to federal prison in January 2003, I was unsuccessful in completing the payment plan. My grandmother had agreed to continue to make the payments while I was incarcerated but she eventually became unable to do so. The bankruptcy case was dismissed on June 9, 2004.

Seth Taylor v. Keeda Haynes, Case No. 3:17-cv-01443. On November 9, 2017, a former client of mine filed a complaint against me in the Middle District Court of Tennessee, alleging ineffective assistance of counsel in violation of his civil rights under 42 USC §1983. Twelve days later, on November 21, 2017, Judge Waverly Crenshaw issued a Memorandum and Order dismissing the complaint based upon Mr. Taylor's failure to "state a claim upon which relief can be granted". No appeal was taken in the case.

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.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

Political and Social Action Co-Chair

2023-2024

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.

a. If so, list such organizations and describe the basis of the membership limitation.

b. 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.

Yes.

A. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.' s, membership is strictly limited to those who identify as women. Men are not permitted to join or affiliate in any official capacity.

B. It is not my intention to denounce my membership in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. or withdraw from participation in its activities if I am nominated and selected to be the next criminal court judge. My continued involvement aligns directly with the mission, values, and responsibilities of the role I seek.

Delta Sigma Theta, Inc is a private, nonprofit organization of college-educated women committed to public service, with a primary focus on the Black community. Through its Five-Point Programmatic Thrust—Economic Development, Educational Development, International Awareness and Involvement, Physical and Mental Health, and Political Awareness and Involvement—the Sorority has remained at the forefront of civil rights and social justice advocacy for over a century.

As someone whose professional and personal life is rooted in advancing justice, equity, and community empowerment, my membership in Delta Sigma Theta enhances—not conflicts with—my public service. The Sorority's mission and its legacy of activism are consistent with

my work in restoring voting rights, advocating for criminal justice reform, and supporting families impacted by incarceration.

Remaining an active member allows me to continue engaging in collective service efforts while upholding the ethical and professional obligations of being a judge. My affiliation is not political or partisan in nature; it is service-driven and deeply connected to community advancement—principles that would only strengthen my ability to lead with integrity and purpose.

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 Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers 2013 - 2020

Nashville Bar Association 2013 - 2019

Gideons Promise 2012 - 2019

Emerge Tennessee 2020

National Association of Public Defenders 2016-2019

Just Leadership USA 2022

Board Member of National Association of Public Defense 2024

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.

FJEC Justice Award (2023): Awarded for my demonstrated commitment to advancing justice and equity through legal advocacy and community engagement.

Outstanding Work to the Poor Award – Metropolitan Nashville Public Defender's Office (2019): Presented in recognition of my exceptional service and advocacy on behalf of indigent clients.

Award for Appreciation – NAACP (2017): Recognized for my contributions to civil rights and community justice advocacy.

Courage, Faith, and Commitment Award – African American Heritage Foundation (2017): Honored for my leadership and dedication to social justice reform and community empowerment.

Appointment – Juvenile Justice Realignment Task Force, Tennessee House of Representatives (October 2016 – January 2017): Appointed to a legislative task force to review and recommend reforms to Tennessee's juvenile justice system, with a focus on reducing racial disparities and improving outcomes for youth.

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.

In 2020, I ran for United States Representative for the 5th District. This is an elected position.

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

I'm seeking the Davidson County Criminal Court Judicial appointment because this work is deeply personal to me. I've sat at nearly every side of the courtroom—as a defendant, a defense attorney, an advocate, and a voice for those who are often unheard. I know firsthand the power the criminal legal system holds, and I believe that power must be wielded with integrity, fairness, and deep compassion. My legal career—whether in the courtroom, the legislature, or the community—has been grounded in a commitment to justice, informed by experience, and driven by purpose. I bring not only the legal knowledge and work ethic required of a judge, but the temperament, humility, and lived understanding of what's at stake. I want to ensure that every person who walks into that courtroom is seen, heard, and treated with dignity—because I've been that person, and I know how much it 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)***

The Criminal Court bench in Davidson County, a primarily urban jurisdiction, handles felony cases across six divisions. Davidson County is 24% Black, and in 2018, zip code 37208—one of Nashville's most predominantly Black areas—had the highest incarceration rate in the country. These disparities underscore the urgent need for a bench that reflects both the diversity and lived experiences of the communities most impacted by the criminal legal system.

Currently there are four women—two who are Black—but none bring the unique combination of lived experience, legal expertise, and deep community connections like me. As a formerly incarcerated Black woman, former public defender, and policy advocate, I have not only

practiced law—I have lived its consequences. My appointment would bring a critical perspective missing from the bench, rooted in integrity, compassion, and firsthand understanding of the system's impact, helping to restore trust and fairness in our courts.

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 law because the rule of law must be respected to ensure fairness, consistency, and integrity, even when the outcome is difficult.

As a public defender, I once represented a mother who had an outstanding warrant. When she realized she would be taken into custody, her instinct was to flee—her children were in daycare, and she feared what would happen to them. I had to quickly gain her trust; help coordinate with her family to ensure her children were safe, and reassure her that turning herself in was the right course of action. Watching her be handcuffed while visibly distressed about her children was heartbreaking. I didn't agree with the rigidity of the law in that moment, but I upheld it, because that was my duty.

This experience—and many others—reinforced my belief that while judges must follow the law, even when it removes discretion, they must do so with compassion, humility, and humanity. Sometimes, applying the law requires difficult decisions, but how those decisions are carried out matters deeply.

If appointed, I will approach the bench with an unwavering commitment to upholding the law and a deep understanding of the people it affects. I will ensure that even when the law is firm, the courtroom remains a place of dignity, fairness, and trust for everyone who enters it.

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.

Charles K. Grant
Shareholder
Baker Donelson Law Firm
[redacted]

Joy Radice
Director of Clinical Programs and Associate Professor of Law
UT Legal Clinic

Winston College of Law University of Tennessee [redacted]
Dr. Sekou Franklin Executive Director of the John Lewis Center for Social Justice Fisk University [redacted]
Senator Brenda Gilmore Former State Senator [redacted]
Johnetta Nelson Director of General Sessions Court Probation Department and Traffic School [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] **Davidson County Criminal Court, Division III** 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: June 25, 2025.

Signature

When completed, return this questionnaire to John Jefferson at the Administrative Office of the Courts, 511 Union Street, Suite 600, Nashville, TN 37219.

TENNESSEE TRIAL COURT VACANCY COMMISSION
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

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

TENNESSEE BOARD OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
TENNESSEE BOARD OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT
AND OTHER LICENSING BOARDS

WAIVER OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I hereby waive the privilege of confidentiality with respect to any information that concerns me, including public discipline, private discipline, deferred discipline agreements, diversions, dismissed complaints and any complaints erased by law, and is known to, recorded with, on file with the Board of Professional Responsibility of the Supreme Court of Tennessee, the Tennessee Board of Judicial Conduct (previously known as the Court of the Judiciary) and any other licensing board, whether within or outside the State of Tennessee, from which I have been issued a license that is currently active, inactive or other status. I hereby authorize a representative of the Trial Court Vacancy Commission to request and receive any such information and distribute it to the membership of the Commission and to the Office of the Governor.

Keeda J. Haynes
Type or Print Name

Signature

Please identify other licensing boards that have issued you a license, including the state issuing the license and the license number.

06-25-2025

Date

031518

BPR #