

Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office

04/15/16

Name: Lee Ann Pafford Dobson

Office Address: 7515 Corporate Centre Drive
(including county) Germantown, Shelby County, Tennessee 38138

Office Phone: (901) 754-9935 Facsimile: (901) 737-9499

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 word processing 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 word processing 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. Submit original (unbound) completed application (with ink signature) to the Administrative Office of the Courts. In addition, submit a digital copy with electronic or scanned signature via email to debra.hayes@tncourts.gov, or via another digital storage device such as flash drive or CD.

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

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND WORK EXPERIENCE

1. State your present employment.

I am the owner/operator of Dobson Law Firm, PLLC. I have owned my own practice since 1998 which was formerly known as Rikard & Dobson, PLLC. Now I practice primarily in the area of family law which includes divorce, child support, child custody, paternity and adoptions, however, my practice has included personal injury, traffic tickets, DUI's, shoplifting, bankruptcy, probate, collection cases and contract disputes. I have employed as many as three associates and three paralegals at the same time.

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 law in Tennessee 1984 and my BPR No. is 11307.

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 licensed to practice law in the State of Tennessee. I have no other licenses to practice law in any other states. I did apply to take the bar exam in the State of Georgia in 1990 when my Husband's job moved us to Thomasville, Georgia, however, we moved back to Shelby County before the Georgia Bar Exam was administered, so I never sat for the exam.

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, never.

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).

Upon graduation from the University of Florida in 1978, I moved to Hawaii with my parents. After two months, I was hired to teach sixth and seventh graders in Madison, Florida. I accepted the job on a Tuesday, flew out of Hawaii to Florida on a Wednesday

and taught my first day of school that Friday. The next year, 1979, I taught fifth and sixth graders at Saint George's Day School here in Germantown, TN. In 1980, I worked as a collector for a loan company, took classes towards a master's degree and applied to law school. I graduated from the University of Memphis Law School in 1984 and began a clerkship with Judge Mark Walker who was the Presiding Judge of the Court of Criminal Appeals. That position lasted for one year, after which I began work at the Law Firm of Dowden & Monroe from September 1985 until March 1989. I went to work for the Law Offices of John R. Johnson, III, P.C. At that time, my husband took a job in Thomasville, Georgia with Davis Water and since my extended family lived in that area and we had a small child, we moved from Memphis in December 1989 and I began work for the Law Firm of Whitehurst, Cohen & Blackburn. I applied for admission to the Georgia Bar, however, we moved back to Memphis before the exam was administered. We returned to Memphis in November 1990, I worked for Rice, Rice, Smith, Bursi, Veazey & Amundsen until October 1991. I returned to the Law Offices of John R. Johnson, III in October 1991, and continued to practice with his firm until April 1998 when I formed Rikard & Dobson, PLLC with my then partner, Richard Rikard. I became the Dobson Law Firm, PLLC January 1, 2011, and have owned my own business since that time.

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.

The majority of my practice is in the area of family law. I practice in Chancery and Circuit Court handling divorces, custody, child support and adoptions, as well as Juvenile Court where I handle cases dealing with paternity, child support, and parenting time. My practice has also included personal injury cases, bankruptcy, probate, collection cases and contract disputes. Presently, about 95% of my cases are in the family law area.

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 graduated from the University of Memphis Law School in 1984 and began a clerkship with Judge Mark Walker who was Presiding Judge of the Court of Criminal Appeals. I learned appellate procedure and brief writing. I traveled to the three grand divisions in Tennessee and co-wrote many opinions. My experience working with the Court of Criminal Appeals lead to brief writing work for fellow attorneys.

After the one year allowed for clerks, I entered private practice with Dowden & Monroe. As a general practitioner, I handled numerous cases in General Sessions Court including auto accidents and contract law. I have tried more cases in General Sessions Court than I can count which included a negligence case where an employee installed a defective oil filter which allowed the oil to drain out and burn up a Nissan engine; and contract law cases including one where I sued a private school for failure to provide courses as

advertised. I tried a personal injury case where a crop duster sprayed the wrong field and caused injuries to the family that lived there which resulted in damages paid to the family. I was co-counsel in a jury trial with William Monroe on a motorcycle accident lawsuit. I stayed at the Law Firm of Dowden & Monroe from September 1985 until March 1989.

I first worked for the Law Offices of John R. Johnson, III, P.C., in March 1989 until December 1989 at which time, my husband took a job in Thomasville, Georgia with Davis Water. Since my extended family lived in that area and we had a small child, we moved from Memphis to Thomasville, Georgia and I began work for the Law Firm of Whitehurst, Cohen & Blackburn. I applied for admission to the Georgia Bar, however, we moved before the exam was administered and returned to Memphis in November 1990. I then worked for Rice, Rice, Smith, Bursi, Veazey & Amundsen until October 1991.

I returned to the Law Offices of John R. Johnson, III in October 1991, and continued to practice with his firm until April 1998. During my practice with the Law Offices of John R. Johnson, III, I was co-counsel on several personal injury cases, including a train accident involving the death of a minor child. I handled conservatorship cases, guardian cases and probate matters here in Shelby County Tennessee. I also handled DUI cases, shoplifting cases, and domestic assault cases in General Sessions Criminal Court in Memphis, Tennessee. I was trained as a mediator and presided over numerous Federal Farm Bureau mediations that involved the governmental lending practices and farm subsidies.

I formed Rikard & Dobson, PLLC in 1998 with my then partner, Richard Rikard. I began my focus on family law issues, however, I continued to practice general law including negotiating a cell tower contract between Bell South and Capleville United Methodist Church. I also trained for five days to become a domestic relations mediator. I was a Rule 31 mediator but have allowed that accreditation to lapse.

I have handled Probate Court cases and was appointed as co-guardian in Shelby County with the mother of a five year old and we invested appropriately so that the child was able to graduate from college in the east. I am proud to say that this brilliant young man recently graduated from law school and is currently practicing law in California. I have handled, as co-counsel, probate cases in Rogers, Arkansas, Virginia Beach, Virginia, and Richmond, Virginia.

I have also been honored to serve as Special Judge, in City Court, General Sessions Criminal Court and Environmental Court. I was usually contacted directly by the sitting Judge, to fill in for the day during his or her absence. I cannot begin to list the dates of each and every appearance, nor the substance of each case presented to me due to the numerous occasions and lengthy dockets. I did receive cufflinks emblazoned with the Seal of the City of Memphis as a reward for my willingness to serve.

I became the Dobson Law Firm, PLLC January 1, 2011, when my longtime partner married and moved to Texas. I continue to provide legal services and have made it my mission to inform my clients of all of their options and explain the legal process to them in

terms they can understand. I believe every person deserves their day in court. Litigants need the most experienced and competent attorney they can afford. I have provided valuable and necessary services to my clients for the past thirty (30) years during my tenure as a lawyer.

My personal work habits are exemplary. I am usually in the office by 8:00 a.m. and do not leave before 5:00 p.m. I greatly enjoy solving puzzles and consider legal issues as puzzles to be understood and resolved creatively, within the bounds of the law, and with the maximum satisfaction possible to the litigants and lawyers.

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

As a young lawyer clerking for the Criminal Court of Appeals, I co-wrote many published opinions. Due to my experience as a law clerk for Judge Walker, I was subsequently hired to write briefs to the Court of Appeals for other attorneys.

I have also handled several cases on appeal with the Tennessee Court of Appeals in the context of divorce cases, one involving division of railroad retirement benefits which was tried before Judge George Brown and another involving the division of an insurance business as a division of marital assets before Judge James Russell.

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

I have donated my time and legal services to several women in Moriah House, an organization that helps women rehabilitate themselves from drug dependency to reconnect with their children. As co-founder and Board Member of Memphis Area Golden Retriever Rescue ("MAGRR"), an organization devoted to finding forever homes for lost, abandoned, and abused golden retrievers, I have served as their legal advisor for the past fourteen (14) years.

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 the Part III Chancellor position that was open in the Fall of 2014 due to Kenny Armstrong being appointed to the Court of Appeals. I was not selected as one of the three names recommended to the Governor. I also applied to be considered for the opening in Circuit Court Division III in December/January 2016, after the death of D'Army Bailey.

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.

I graduated from Heidelberg American High School in Heidelberg, Germany in 1974, and attended the University of Florida in the Fall of that year. I graduated in May 1978 with a degree in Bachelor of Arts and a Teaching degree. I taught school for one year in Madison, Florida and then taught school at St. George's Day School in Memphis, Tennessee. I began law school in the Fall of 1981 at the University of Memphis Law School and graduated in May 1984.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

I was born June 6, 1956 in Cherry Point, North Carolina.

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

I have lived continuously in the State of Tennessee since 1990.

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

I have lived continuously in Shelby County, Tennessee since 1990.

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

Shelby County, Tennessee.

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.

I was not in the military, however, my father retired from the Marine Corps as a Colonel after thirty (30) years of service and my family traveled with him throughout his career in the military.

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.

I have had two complaints filed against me in my thirty (30) years of practice with the Board of Professional Responsibility. The first was in 1988 and that complaint was dismissed with no action. The second I believe, was in 1995, when I was given a private censure for an appearance of a conflict of interest. I filed a divorce for a woman who later reconciled with her husband, and she and her husband were represented in a personal injury lawsuit by an attorney within the firm, even though the divorce had not yet been 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.

Yes. I was sued by an associate attorney, Misty D. Becker, in the dissolution of our employment agreement with my firm. The lawsuit was brought by Ms. Becker and filed in the Circuit Court of Shelby County, Tennessee under Docket Number CT-000085-08 on or about January 7, 2008. That lawsuit was resolved through mediation and an Order dismissing the case was entered on April 15, 2014. Ms. Becker has fully paid the judgment awarded to me as a result of the settlement.

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 Zonta International since 2001, which is a professional business women's association to advance the status of women worldwide. I have been the President, Secretary and Treasurer of said club within the past five (5) years. I am also a co-founder of the Memphis Area Golden Retriever Rescue, Inc. ("MAGRR") that was founded in 2000. I am currently on the Board of Directors and serve as legal counsel for the organization. We find homes for lost, abandoned, and abused golden retrievers.

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.

No.

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.

I have been a member of the Memphis Bar Association and the Tennessee Bar Association in the last ten (10) years.

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.

I have received a Certificate of Appreciation in Recognition of Outstanding Service as Special Judge in City Court. I have received the Order of the Barristers having exhibited excellence and high honor through the art of Courtroom advocacy. During my candidacy for Judge of Division III of Circuit Court, the lawyers of the Memphis Bar Association voted me "most qualified" for the position. I was also endorsed for this position by the Shelby County Republican party.

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 was a candidate in the August 7, 2014 election for the position of Division III of the Circuit Court of Shelby County, Tennessee. Said position was due to the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Karen R. Williams. My opponent was D'Army Bailey, a former Judge for nineteen (19) years. I was endorsed by the Republican Party even though the judicial candidates are to run without political affiliation. Despite the experience of my opponent, I was voted by the Memphis Bar Association as "most qualified" for the position for which I ran. I received over 61,000 votes in that election which unfortunately, did not result in my winning the position. Many other successful candidates on the ballot, did not receive the support of over 61,000 voters, but yet won their positions. I was delighted, as a first time candidate, to receive so many votes and so much support from the community at large. As you know, Judge Bailey passed away after nine months on the bench.

I also applied in the Fall of 2014 for the position of Chancellor for Part III. I was not selected as one of the three names recommended to the Governor.

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

I am seeking this position because I believe I have much to offer to the citizens of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee. I believe I have the necessary judicial temperament and knowledge, as well as the support of numerous lawyers and citizens as evidenced by votes when running as a candidate in the 2014 judicial election. I can and will treat everyone in the courtroom with patience, dignity and equality. I would be honored to serve my

community and give back the grace I have received in life.

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 would be honored to serve, and hope I am considered, for the position of Judge of Division VII of the Circuit Court of the Thirtieth Judicial District at Memphis at Shelby County, Tennessee. The Circuit Court in Shelby County has nine Judges hearing cases. I believe my experience with domestic cases, which make up nearly one half of the cases filed in Shelby County, would be valuable to the other Judges and litigants alike. I am not politically motivated to seek this position but rather to serve the people, the county, the judicial system, the governor, and the state. I believe my thirty (30) years of legal experience, my patience and practical approach to dealing with people under stress, would be a benefit to the Circuit Court. The people of this County deserve a Circuit Court Judge who arrives on time, works hard and efficiently administers the cases before the Court.

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)*

It is my sworn duty as a lawyer, officer of the Court and/or Judge, to uphold the laws of the State of Tennessee as presently written. It is immaterial whether I agree or disagree with the law. During my thirty (30) years of practice, I have represented clients to whom I thought the imposition of the law was unfair, and I have sought to change those results. Specifically, I represented a man who was divorced from his wife. The Wife was awarded legal custody of the two minor children of the marriage. The father obtained a job offer outside the United States, and the parents agreed that it would be a wonderful learning opportunity for the children to go with the father for the next two (2) years to another country. The parties signed a document that they prepared, attempting to give legal custody to the father, suspending child support, and had said document notarized. Two (2) years later, upon the father's return, the mother desired the children reside with her again, and sued the father for two (2) years of child support since they had never entered an Order with the Court. Unfortunately, the law states that once child support becomes due, it cannot be forgiven. Although the parties clearly agreed the children should live with the father overseas and suspend child support at that time, and because their notarized agreement was not filed with the Court, the purported change in custody was invalid. It seemed patently unfair to me that the father owed two years support since there was no dispute of the parties' intent. The father was ordered to pay the child support, with interest, even though mother agreed and allowed the children to live with their father but the rules of law had not been met.

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.

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| A. Larry Rice, Attorney at Law, | |
| B. Ronald D. Krelstein, Attorney at Law, | |
| C. Michael and Lane Doyle, Lynn Doyle Flowers, t | |
| D. Laurel Niday, | |
| E. Carey Woods, Divorce Referee, | |

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] Circuit Court, Division VII 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: 7-6- , 2016


Signature



When completed, return this questionnaire to Debbie Hayes, 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.

Lee Ann Pafford Dobson

Type or Print Name

Signature

July 6, 2016

Date

011307

BPR #

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

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