

Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office

04/15/16

Name: Christopher Vance Sockwell

Office Address: 235 Waterloo Street, Post Office Box 357
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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 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 by the noon deadline date an 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.

Boston, Holt, Sockwell & Durham, PLLC
235 Waterloo Street, P.O. Box 357, Lawrenceburg, TN 38464
[REDACTED]
Phone 931-762-7167
Fax 931-762-5878

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 in 1993, and my Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility number is 016298.

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.

In addition to Tennessee, I am licensed to practice law in Alabama and have been since 1994. My Alabama State Bar number is ASB-9809-E60C and my Alabama license is 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).

For twenty-five years, I have practiced law in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee and the surrounding areas, including all counties of the Twenty-Second Judicial District. I joined what is now Boston, Holt, Sockwell & Durham, PLLC ("bhsd") as an associate in 1993. I became a member of our firm in 1998 and have enjoyed a general litigation oriented practice since.

Additionally, I taught a business law course to night students as an adjunct professor at Columbia State Community College for several years.

During law school I clerked with the Knoxville firm Hodges, Doughty & Carson, PLLC and conducted legal research for bhsd. I also was a student representative in the Office of Student Conduct at the University of Tennessee ("UT"), where I prosecuted and defended fellow UT students in varying stages of student conduct hearings.

Prior to law school, I briefly worked for a temporary employment agency before accepting a tenure-track position with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. I taught mathematics courses, including general mathematics, algebra, and calculus at Pearl-Cohn High School for four (4) years. While there, I was head baseball coach and an assistant football coach. During summer recesses I also worked baseball camps for David Lipscomb College's head baseball coach, Ken Dugan, as well as several basketball camps at the college.

While an undergraduate student at David Lipscomb College I was a resident assistant and intermural sports official. I also umpired softball games for the Metropolitan Nashville Parks and Recreation Department.

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.

While varied and almost always in a state of fluctuation based on trends in the legal market, my practice has narrowed somewhat in the last five years. Most significantly, I manage our firm's Social Security disability practice both at the administrative level and on appeal. That area of the law comprises approximately fifty percent (50%) of my current practice, with general civil litigation being second at thirty percent (30%). Estate planning and probating, domestic work, and minor criminal matters constitute the remaining twenty percent (20%) of my practice.

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.

My legal experience has been quite broad thanks to the general nature of our firm, the varying and divergent needs of small communities, and the legacy our firm's founders established. I have extensive experience in Tennessee trial and appellate courts, state and federal administrative bodies, regulatory boards, and transactional matters.

It is incumbent upon small town lawyers to handle a wide range of cases, and I have enjoyed delving into many practice areas to meet the needs of our clients. I have handled the ubiquitous dog bite case, the tumultuous boundary line dispute, the emotional custody battle, and the argument over a grandparent's prized possession. I have litigated cases involving serious personal injury and even death. I have guided clients through disputes with insurance companies over failure to pay fire, property, and disability claims. I have represented individual clients, government municipalities, corporations, limited liability companies, partnerships, and joint

ventures. My Alabama license even has afforded me the privilege of representing clients in Limestone, Lauderdale, Colbert, Winston, Jefferson, and Mobile Counties in that state.

My trial experience includes hundreds of bench trials primarily in the Twenty-Second Judicial District, and taken numerous jury trials to verdict. Those jury trials include automobile accidents, other personal injury matters, products liability cases, and will contests. I have also been involved in multiple mediations over the years regarding all types of cases.

I have represented clients in numerous general sessions courts across the State in landlord tenant disputes, detainer actions, collection cases, criminal charges, contract disputes, and bailment issues.

From the early stages of my legal experience, I have engaged in significant appellate work. I have represented clients in the briefing and oral argument stages of approximately thirty (30) cases before the Tennessee Supreme Court, the Tennessee Supreme Court's Worker's Compensation Panel, and the Tennessee Court of Appeals. Six of those cases resulted in published opinions, including: *Ezell v. Cockrell*, 902 S.W.2d 394 (Tenn. 1995); *Erwin v. Rose*, 980 S.W.2d 203 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1998).

Over the last few years I have reduced somewhat the breadth of my practice by referring domestic and criminal matters to other lawyers in our firm so that I can focus on social security disability work and complex personal injury matters. In that regard, I have litigated hundreds of cases before the federal Office of Disability Adjudication and Review.

Finally, though a relatively small aspect of my legal experience, I have assisted in representing numerous corporate and other business entities in transactional work ranging from real estate transfers to mergers and acquisitions of mostly small- to medium-sized local businesses.

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

Our firm litigated one of the first cases for which I had real responsibility early in my practice all the way to the Tennessee Supreme Court. See *Ezell v. Cockrell* 902 S.W.2d 394. It was the first case involving the TN Public Duty rule since the adoption of the Governmental Tort Liability Act. Through the appeals, I was fortunate to argue what we believed to be a good faith extension of the law and/or need to change the law to better articulate a governmental entity's duty to the public under the new scheme of fault assessment pursuant to the then newly-instituted comparative fault doctrine of *McIntyre v. Balentine*, 833 S.W.2d 52 (Tenn. 1992). While the Court saw the issue differently than we had hoped, the experience was a crucible early in my career that reinforced the weight of our profession and the impact we as lawyers can have on all Tennesseans. I have tried to carry that lesson with me throughout my practice to continually grow my legal knowledge and ability honed by the legal experience I have been so fortunate to garner to the benefit of my clients and the judicial system.

That very notion perhaps is what made social security work so appealing to me initially. It is a very frontline practice offering tangible, potentially life-changing benefits to some of our most needy citizens. That administrative practice, while certainly different than traditional litigation, illustrates that justice can be a linear process if those responsible for it, and in particular judges, apply integrity, impartiality, temperament, and legal expertise to public service.

Practically, my representation of hundreds of social security applicants with mental health issues has opened my eyes to the unique struggles of that population and its particular access to justice barriers. Those struggles so often interrelate with addiction that the judicial system's attempt to remove those roadblocks must be intertwined. Through my ongoing relationship with Centerstone Mental Health Center, which provides treatment to almost all of my clients with mental health issues, this practice has given me a unique perspective of the conditions, treatment, and counseling needed by people with mental disabilities. It also has given me a beneficial insight to how our legal system can improve the way it deals with mental illness and addiction, such as via the Twenty-Second Judicial District's newly reinitiated drug court that I believe has and will continue to have an unmatched positive effect on citizens in need.

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

For approximately 17 years, I have served as municipal judge and city attorney for Ethridge, Tennessee. As judge, I hold court monthly dealing usually with minor traffic offenses and violation of ordinances. In my role as city attorney, I have represented Ethridge in zoning matters and other cases of potential litigation involving the city.

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

This is my first application for a judicial position.

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, 1990-1993, Juris Doctorate.

American Jurisprudence Award for Torts and Trial Practice.

David Lipscomb College, 1981-1986, Bachelor of Science, Math Education with a minor in Engineering Science.

Auburn University, Summer 1984, no degree, took engineering classes to supplement my course work at David Lipscomb College.

Northwest Shoals Community College, early 1980's, no degree, took general education classes to supplement my course work at David Lipscomb College.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

██████ 1963.

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

I have been a full time resident of the State of Tennessee and lived here continuously for the last thirty two (32) years.

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

I have lived continuously in Lawrence County, Tennessee for the last twenty five (25) years.

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

Lawrence.

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.

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 responded to three formal complaints filed against me with the Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility. The Board dismissed all three complaints.

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.

No.

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.

Lawrenceburg Babe Ruth Organization, Lawrenceburg Babe Ruth World Series Committee, 2015, 2017; Pulaski Street Church of Christ.

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.

None of which I am aware.

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.

Lawrence County Bar Association; Tennessee Bar Association; Tennessee Municipal Judges Conference; Alabama State Bar Association.

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.

Fellow of the Tennessee Bar Association Young Lawyer's Division

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 appointed City Judge of Ethridge, Tennessee in 2001 and have served in that capacity since.

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

I am thankful, mostly for four things:

1. Experiences as a person of faith, husband, father of three (25, 22, and 17), school teacher, coach, official, and community leader that give me a calm temperament.
2. Integrity and industry instilled in me by my parents that benefit me in all aspects of life.
3. Legal experiences that challenge personal growth, develop solid legal knowledge and ability, and value impartiality.
4. A diverse practice that affords my family wonderful opportunities.

Being thankful, though, is not enough. I am ready to show that thanks by public service. I understand the gravity of legal issues. I trust that the judiciary matters. I know that people deserve respect and to be treated with dignity and fairness. I believe that justice must be administered fairly and impartially. I apply for this position to manifest my thanks, live these values, and do good by public service.

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 seek a judgeship in the Twenty-Second Judicial District that includes Maury, Lawrence, Giles, and Wayne counties and currently is served by four circuit judges. These judges hear cases, as arbiters of the law and sometimes trier-of-fact, in almost all aspects of state law. Maury County has the largest population by far, but when combining Lawrence, Giles, and Wayne counties, the populations are comparable. My impact on the court, in addition to the qualifications otherwise discussed, would be geographic. My residence in Lawrence County is close and easily accessible to Wayne and Giles counties giving me excellent access to all courthouses in the circuit and gives all citizens of the circuit easier access to justice.

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)*

As judge, I will strive to uphold and apply the law to the facts at hand, regardless of what my personal opinions or beliefs on a given issue might be. Litigants expect and are entitled to a fair and impartial disposition of their cases, and a judge's opposing views should not cloud the administration of justice. I have dealt with this as an attorney in the context of custody disputes—particularly grandparent visitation. In one such case, my client vehemently opposed regular visitation with her child's grandparents, resulting in very emotionally driven litigation. In

my personal life, my extended family are very close on both sides and have been heavily involved throughout our children's lives, which I feel has had a positive influence on their upbringing. Thus, I disagreed with my client's staunch position and was sympathetic with the grandparents' desire to spend time with their grandchild. However, while the legislature has carved out an avenue for grandparents seeking visitation, I advised my client of the burden on grandparents under the statute and how to strategically defeat their petition by not completely "severing" the grandparent/grandchild relationship (although the statute has since changed to be slightly more lenient). I advocated for my client while using the law as written to her benefit, despite my personal beliefs to the contrary.

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. Alan Potts, Tennessee Farm Bureau, Insurance Agent, 825 Hwy 100 Centerville, TN 37033, [REDACTED]

B. Jan Outland McKeel, Columbia, Tennessee. Executive Director, South Central TN Workforce Alliance, [REDACTED] Columbia, TN 38401, [REDACTED]

C. Lisa R. Cole, Attorney at Law, Nashville, Tennessee. Lewis Thomason 424 Church Street, Suite 2500, P. O. Box 198615, Nashville, TN 37219, [REDACTED]

D. Alan Betz, Attorney at Law, 22 Public Square, Lawrenceburg, TN 38464, [REDACTED]

E. The Honorable David L. Allen, Circuit Judge, Twenty-Second Judicial District, 200 Mahr Avenue, P.O. Box 369, Lawrenceburg, TN 38464, [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 Circuit Court of the Twenty-Second 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: August 29, 2018.



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.

Christopher V. Sockwell

Type or Print Name



Signature

August 29, 2018

Date

016298

BPR #

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

Alabama State Bar Association, State of Alabama,

license number ASB-9809-E60C