

**Tennessee Judicial Nominating Commission**  
***Application for Nomination to Judicial Office***

*Rev. 22 December 2011*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Sonya W. Henderson \_\_\_\_\_

Office Address: \_\_\_\_\_ 218 W. Main Street Murfreesboro, TN 37130 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Rutherford County \_\_\_\_\_

(including county)

Office Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ 615.848.9090 \_\_\_\_\_ Facsimile: 615.848.9099 \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ [REDACTED] \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_ [REDACTED] \_\_\_\_\_

(including county)

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ [REDACTED] \_\_\_\_\_ Cellular Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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**INTRODUCTION**

Tennessee Code Annotated section 17-4-101 charges the Judicial Nominating 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 <http://www.tncourts.gov>). The Commission requests that applicants obtain the word processing form and respond directly on the form. Please respond in the box provided below each question. (The box will expand as you type in the word processing document.) Please read the separate instruction sheet prior to completing this document. Please submit the completed form to the Administrative Office of the

Courts in paper format (with ink signature) *and* electronic format (either as an image or a word processing file and with electronic or scanned signature). Please submit seventeen (17) paper copies to the Administrative Office of the Courts. Please e-mail a digital copy to

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

**PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND WORK EXPERIENCE**

1. State your present employment.

Self employed Attorney

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

1988 013269

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

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

No

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

I have been a self employed trial attorney since 1988. I have some rental properties that I upkeep.

6. If you have not been employed continuously since completion of your legal education, describe what you did during periods of unemployment in excess of six months.

N/A

7. 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 nature of my law practice has always consisted of workers compensation law, personal injury law, domestic law and employment law. The percentage of those areas changes from year to year. A fair average would be 40% workers compensation, 40% domestic, 10% personal injury, 10% employment law. The shift in percentages could happen in employment law cases. For example in 2011 I took 5 discharged nurses from MTMC on the basis of age discrimination. Those five cases took up 65% of my time if not more.

8. 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. In making your description, include information about the types of matters in which you have represented clients (e.g., information about whether you have handled criminal matters, civil matters, transactional matters, regulatory matters, etc.) and your own personal involvement and activities in the matters where you have been involved. In responding to this question, please be guided by the fact that in order to properly evaluate your application, the Commission needs information about your range of experience, your own personal work and work habits, and your work background, as your legal experience is a very important component of the evaluation required of the Commission. Please provide detailed information that will allow the Commission to evaluate your qualification for the judicial office for which you have applied. The failure to provide detailed information, especially in this question, will hamper the evaluation of your application. Also separately describe any matters of special note in trial courts, appellate courts, and administrative bodies.

I have handled many civil matters since 1988. I have been in the trial courts with domestic matters and workers compensation matters extensively. I have been in the Appellate Court on many occasions. I have just recently been involved with the full Supreme Court panel in a workers compensation case that unfortunately had a bad outcome in the Supreme Court but a good outcome in the trial court. I have slip and fall cases that I have tried and I have one presently waiting on a decision in the Appellate Court. I have numerous domestic cases that have been tried. The Domestic cases are probably several hundred of them and I have been in the Appellate Court numerous times on domestic issues. I have tried cases in front of the claims commission also. My work ethic has always been exemplary. I have worked on weekends much of my attorney life. I work more than eight hour days during the week.

9. Also separately describe any matters of special note in trial courts, appellate courts, and administrative bodies.

I would not know of what is considered of special note as opposed to every day matters for me.

10. If you have served as a mediator, an arbitrator or a judicial officer, describe your experience (including dates and details of the position, the courts or agencies involved, whether elected or appointed, and a description of your duties). Include here detailed description(s) of any noteworthy cases over which you presided or which you heard as a judge, mediator or arbitrator. Please state, as to each case: (1) the date or period of the proceedings; (2) the name of the court or agency; (3) a summary of the substance of each case; and (4) a statement of the significance of the case.

N/A

11. Describe generally any experience you have of serving in a fiduciary capacity such as guardian ad litem, conservator, or trustee other than as a lawyer representing clients.

None

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

None

13. List all prior occasions on which you have submitted an application for judgeship to the Judicial Nominating Commission or any predecessor commission or body. Include the specific position applied for, the date of the meeting at which the body considered your application, and whether or not the body submitted your name to the Governor as a nominee.

Once seven years ago I submitted an application. I was not one of three. It was for a Judgeship with the 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

### EDUCATION

14. 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.

Middle Tennessee State University 1976-1979 BS received. Nashville School of Law 1985 - 1988 Doctorate of Juris Prudence.

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

15. State your age and date of birth.

55 years old October 31, 1956

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

Since 1976

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

36 years

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

Rutherford

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

N/A

20. Have you ever pled guilty or been convicted or are you now on diversion for violation of any law, regulation or ordinance? Give date, court, charge and disposition.

No

21. 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

22. If you have been disciplined or cited for breach of ethics or unprofessional conduct by any court, administrative agency, bar association, disciplinary committee, or other professional group, give details.

No

23. 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

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

No

25. 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.

1997 Henderson v. Henderson Rutherford County Circuit Ct. Divorce proceeding reconciled and dismissed

1997 Massey v. Henderson Rutherford County Circuit Ct. I rear ended another vehicle. Russ Eagle representing Ms. Massey sued me. It was eventually settled.

26. 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.

None

27. 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

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

Tennessee Bar Association 2000 to present, Rutherford County Bar Association 1989 to present, Andrew Jackson Inns of Court 2000 to present, Tennessee Trial Lawyers Association 1992 to 2008 Lawyers Involved for Tennessee (LIFT).

29. 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.

None

30. List the citations of any legal articles or books you have published.

None other than cases cited in the Appellate Court.

31. List law school courses, CLE seminars, or other law related courses for which credit is given that you have taught within the last five (5) years.

None

32. 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.

None

33. Have you ever been a registered lobbyist? If yes, please describe your service fully.

No

34. Attach to this questionnaire at least two examples of legal articles, books, briefs, or other legal writings which reflect your personal work. Indicate the degree to which each example reflects your own personal effort.

What I attach reflects my personal effort.

#### **ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS**

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

I am seeking this position because I find it a challenge and a rewarding career change. I have the integrity and temperament to be an asset to the judiciary in this State.

36. State any achievements or activities in which you have been involved which demonstrate your commitment to equal justice under the law; include here a discussion of your pro bono service throughout your time as a licensed attorney. *(150 words or less)*

I have been active in the past with the Tennessee Trial Lawyers Association but I still find that my finest achievement has been in my own private practice. As a plaintiff's trial attorney I receive several calls on a daily basis from prospective clients. I do not always take the path of least resistance. I will take on a case that I know is an uphill battle but this individual should have their day in Court and with work through discovery I will find the diamond in the rough. I find this to be true in many of my employment law cases.

I still very much believe that in dealing with clients you must be an active listener. It is the core of advocacy. A client's own emotions or limited communication skills can many times make it difficult for them to effectively communicate information vital to his or her case. A client's race, gender or complicated past can make it difficult for his or her voice to be clearly heard through an overlay of stereotypes and prejudices. True advocacy demands not merely hearing the words that your client may be speaking but actively discovering through persistent investigation the import and substance of his or her story.



37. 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)*

16<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, Rutherford and Cannon County, Domestic, Workers Compensation, Employment Law, Criminal, Real Estate. There are presently five judges.

38. Describe your participation in community services or organizations, and what community involvement you intend to have if you are appointed judge? *(250 words or less)*

I live a private life. I am not actively participating in community service or organizations. It is not that I would not do that it just seems that at this time my family and doing outdoor activities take up my time.

39. Describe life experiences, personal involvements, or talents that you have that you feel will be of assistance to the Commission in evaluating and understanding your candidacy for this judicial position. *(250 words or less)*

I am the oldest of six children. My father was an Attorney. He graduated from George Washington School of Law and was the lead Attorney for NASA in the sixties and seventies. My mother went to George Washington School of Law and was an immigrant from Iceland. I have children of my own that I feel I am consistently trying to teach to be better people. I try to instill that all people can be better and do more and if you feel you are at your best there is always room for improvement. I can be loud but I am always looking at what is fair and equitable. I have a good work ethic, patience, perseverance and not bad looking.

40. 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, but the full Supreme Court panel has confused me on this one. See Troy Mitchell v. Fayetteville Utility Company

#### REFERENCES

41. 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. Brenda Benz 4 [REDACTED]

B. Mary Frances Parker 3 [REDACTED]
C. Steve Pendergrast [REDACTED]
D. John Marshall [REDACTED]
E. Barry Tidwell [REDACTED]

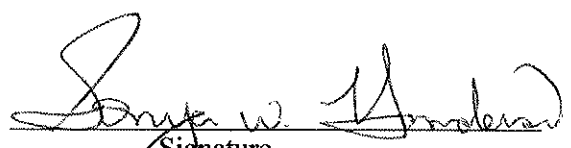
**AFFIRMATION CONCERNING APPLICATION**

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

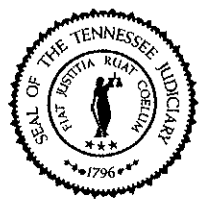
I have read the foregoing questions and have answered them in good faith and as completely as my records and recollections permit. I hereby agree to be considered for nomination to the Governor for the office of Judge of the [Court] Circuit Ct. of Tennessee, and if appointed by the Governor, agree to 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: 07/31, 2012

  
Signature

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



**TENNESSEE JUDICIAL NOMINATING COMMISSION**  
511 UNION STREET, SUITE 600  
NASHVILLE CITY CENTER  
NASHVILLE, TN 37219