

Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office

1/31/19

Name: Vance Walker Dennis

Office Address: 100 Court Square, Huntingdon, Carroll County, TN 38344
(including county)

Office Phone: 731-986-5031 Facsimile: 731-986-5208

Email Address: [REDACTED]

Home Address: [REDACTED] Savannah, Hardin County, TN 38372

Home Phone: N/A Cellular Phone: [REDACTED]

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 ceesha.lofton@tncourts.gov, or via another digital storage device such as a flash drive.

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

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND WORK EXPERIENCE

1. State your present employment.

I am an Assistant District Attorney General in the 24th Judicial District, which is composed of Hardin, Decatur, Benton, Carroll, and Henry Counties.

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 2001, and my Tennessee BPR number is 021178.

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 only in 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).

I have never been denied admission to, suspended or placed on inactive status by the Bar of any State.

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 was a partner at McGee & Dennis, Attorneys at Law, in Savannah, Tennessee, from July 2001 until November 2014. I have been an Assistant District Attorney General in the 24th Judicial District since November 15, 2014. I also served as a State Representative for the 71st House District in the Tennessee General Assembly from November 2008 to November 2014.

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.

My current practice consists almost entirely of prosecuting criminal offenses in the General Sessions and Circuit Courts of the 24th Judicial District. As the chief prosecutor for Hardin County, I am responsible for prosecuting almost all criminal cases brought before the General Sessions and Circuit Court of Hardin County, which constitutes approximately ninety percent of my total practice. For the remaining ten percent, I assist with prosecutions as needed in other Counties in our district, and occasionally as a pro tem prosecutor in other districts.

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.

While in private practice, I represented individuals, business entities and government organizations in a wide variety of legal matters, including criminal defense, divorce and custody matters, civil litigation, real estate, probate, and various other legal and business issues. I practiced in many of the General Sessions, Circuit, Chancery, and Appellate Courts of West and Middle Tennessee.

Since November 2014, I have been a prosecutor as described in the previous paragraph.

During my service in the Tennessee General Assembly, I drafted and sponsored dozens of bills and legislative proposals, many of which becoming State law. Most of my legislative proposals centered on civil and criminal policy issues. In addition, I was responsible for reviewing the impact and propriety of hundreds of legislative proposals each year in my capacity as a member of the House Judiciary, Civil Justice, and Health committees and subcommittees.

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

I have fond memories of numerous worthy battles in the Courtroom and the State Capitol. While each is of special note to myself and the clients, advocates, and/or citizens involved, there are none that sufficiently stand above the others to list individually in my humble opinion.

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

Not applicable.

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

I applied to fill a vacancy on the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals in 2016.

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.

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville, August 1994 to May 1998, B.S. in Agricultural Economics

The University of Tennessee College of Law, August 1998 to December 2000, J.D.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

1975

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

I have lived in Tennessee my entire life.

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

Other than time spent in Knoxville for college and law school, I have lived in Hardin County my entire life.

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

I vote in Hardin 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.

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. You may wish to request a report from the appropriate supervisory authority (or authorities) for a complete history.

One complaint was filed against me with the Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility by a defendant I was appointed to represent many years ago. The complaint was dismissed by the board.

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.

IN RE: EDDIE K. WHITLOW TRUST AGREEMENT. JERRY NELL WHITLOW, PETITIONER, VS. VANCE DENNIS, SUBSTITUTE TRUSTEE, HARDIN COUNTY CHANCERY COURT DOCKET NUMBER 7272.

I was a civil defendant in my capacity as trustee of a testamentary trust for the benefit of a mentally disabled adult. A civil lawsuit was filed by the mother of the disabled beneficiary seeking the appointment of a new trustee. The petition was voluntarily dismissed by the Plaintiff on October 4, 2011.

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 am a member of the Savannah Lions Club, and have held several offices within the club, including President, in the last 15 years. I am also an alumni member of the Alpha Kappa chapter of the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity.

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.

I was an active member of the Alpha Kappa chapter of the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity during my college years, and I am now an alumni member. There were no female members of our chapter to my knowledge. I am not sure if they were specifically prohibited or simply chose not to join our distinguished order. I anticipate being an alumni member for as long as I live.

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 am a member of the Hardin County Bar Association. I was a member of the Tennessee Bar Association from 2001 to 2009.

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.

2011 – Legislator of the Year – Southwest Tennessee Development District

2011 – Community Service Award – Tennessee Hospital Association

2011 – Representative of the Year – Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence

2012 – Healthcare Advocate Award – Hardin County Community and Healthcare Foundation

2012 – Guardian of Small Business Award – National Federation of Independent Business

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 for the Hardin County Commission in 2002. I was a candidate for State Representative in 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014. I served in our State House from 2008 to 2014. I also applied to fill a vacancy on the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals in 2016.

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

I am seeking the position of Chancellor of the 24th Judicial District because I believe it is my best opportunity at this time to utilize my talents, educational achievements and professional skills to the benefit of my community.

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 am seeking the position of Chancellor for the 24th Judicial District of Tennessee. Our judicial district is composed of Hardin, Decatur, Benton, Carroll, and Henry Counties. It stretches from Mississippi to Kentucky. Approximately 1,200 cases are filed in Chancery Court throughout our District each year. Chancery Court resolves almost all domestic proceedings filed in four of our five counties, in addition to the many adoptions, contract disputes, boundary disputes, and other matters of an equitable nature that fall within its jurisdiction. My extensive experience in our Circuit, Sessions and Chancery Courts over the last eighteen years will allow me to fairly, expeditiously, and efficiently manage the substantial dockets found in each of our five counties.

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)*

I will most certainly uphold the laws of our State and Country, regardless of personal beliefs, if I am allowed to serve as Chancellor.

In 2011, our state legislature passed the Exclusionary Rule Reform Act, codified at T.C.A. 40-6-108, which attempts to prohibit suppression of evidence acquired pursuant to a defective search warrant in many situations if the error giving rise to the defect was made in good faith. I was a vocal opponent of this legislation, primarily because I believed it encouraged careless behavior on the part of government when intruding on a fundamental constitutional right. Despite my vigorous opposition, the legislation was swiftly approved and codified.

Upon my retirement from the legislature in 2014, I was often called upon to vigorously defend the act I had so recently and vehemently opposed as I began my new career as a prosecutor. While I still had reservations about the wisdom of the act from a policy perspective, I nonetheless defended its application wholeheartedly as I opposed the suppression of evidence in my cases. Regardless of my personal reservations, I fought for application of this statute because it was my duty. Fortunately, at least from my personal perspective, recent case law has reigned in many of my concerns about the statute in question. Even so, remaining concerns will not alleviate my duty and responsibility in this or any other matter to follow the law as created by our legislature and interpreted by our Courts to the best of my ability.

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. C. Creed McGinley, Circuit Court Judge, 24th Judicial District, 160 Guinn Street,

P.O. Box 548, Savannah, TN 38372, [REDACTED]
B. Frankie Stanfill, Assistant Public Defender, 24 th Judicial District, 176 Briarwood Street, Suite A, Camden, TN 38320-1379
C. Matthew F. Stowe, District Attorney, 24 th Judicial District, 100 Court Square, Huntingdon, TN 38344-3701, [REDACTED]
D. Andy Holt, Tennessee State Representative, 461 Jewell Store Road, Dresden, TN 38225, [REDACTED]
E. Barrett Rich, Board Member, Tennessee Board of Parole, 324 Carrington Place, 38363, [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 Chancellor of the Chancery Court of the 24th 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: May 24, 2019.



 Signature

When completed, return this questionnaire to Ceesha Lofton, 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.

Vance Walker Dennis
Type or Print Name


Signature

May 24, 2019
Date

021178
BPR #

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