

Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office

9/8/20

Name: Anthony Blake Neill

Office Address: 205 West Market Street, P.O. Box 819

Somerville, Fayette County, Tennessee 38068

(including county)

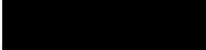
Office Phone: 901-465-3336 Facsimile: 901-465-3385

Email Address: 

Home Address: 

(including county)

Somerville, Fayette County, Tennessee

Home Phone:  Cellular Phone: 

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. 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. 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.

Partner at Matthews Rhea & Neill, PLLC. I have been a partner in the firm since November 2014.

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

2010. 029323.

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: Licensed on October 19, 2010; Bar Number: 029323. My 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).

Professional experience since completion of legal education:

<i>Matthews Rhea & Neill, PLLC</i>	Somerville, TN
November 2014-Present	
Partner	
<i>The University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law</i>	Memphis, TN
August 2015-December 2015	
Adjunct Professor for Appellate Advocacy	

Rainey, Kizer, Reviere & Bell, PLC August 2010-October 2014 Associate	Memphis, TN
Prior work experience:	
Jefferson County Board of Education August 2006-June 2007 Eighth Grade English Teacher and Baseball Coach for Erwin Middle School	Birmingham, AL
First Baptist Church January 2004-August 2004, Summers 2006 and 2007 Youth Pastor	Somerville, TN

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.

Since November of 2014, I have engaged in a general legal practice. I focus my practice primarily on criminal defense and in general civil litigation, but I also perform some transactional work as well. My legal practice generally consists of the following areas: (1) criminal defense—40%; general civil litigation, including business and contractual disputes, construction litigation, collections, and landlord/tenant issues—30%; probate and estate work, including estate planning, probating estates, and probate litigation—20%; and, real estate transactions—10%.

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.

The majority of my legal experience has been practicing in general sessions and circuit court, both in criminal and civil cases. I was an insurance defense attorney for almost the first five years of my legal career, primarily in the Shelby County court system. During this time, I appeared regularly in both circuit and general sessions courts handling personal injury cases, legal and real estate malpractice cases, and insurance coverage matters. I tried numerous bench trials in general sessions court, while my circuit court practice consisted primarily of motion practice, discovery, and mediation since most cases settled outside of court. While practicing in Shelby County, I also practiced in federal court, primarily handling employment law matters but also litigating several personal injury cases, litigation malpractice cases, and insurance coverage cases. Since becoming a partner at Matthews Rhea & Neill, PLLC, I practice primarily in the general sessions, circuit, and chancery courts of Fayette and Hardeman Counties. As set forth above, the majority of my practice consists of criminal defense and general civil litigation. I have participated in at least five criminal jury trials, two of which were first-degree murder

trials. I have also participated in several civil jury trials and numerous bench trials in general sessions, circuit, and chancery court. I continue to engage in discovery and mediation as well. Throughout my legal career, I have also participated in numerous appeals before the Tennessee Court of Appeals and the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals and have participated in administrative hearings primarily with the Department of Children's Services. Finally, for the last five years, my transactional practice has consisted of preparing estate planning documents, conducting real estate transactions, preparing corporate formation documents, and preparing documents for commercial transactions, including lease agreements and asset purchase agreements.

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

Please see response to No. 7.

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

In my experience as a civil and criminal litigator, reminding my clients that I am not only an advocate but a counselor, and then attempting to give wise counsel, has been one of the most rewarding parts of my career. And often, this results in cases being resolved outside of the courtroom and sometimes before litigation even occurs. This experience does not receive the prestige of a jury trial or get recorded in appellate opinions, but the experience of talking to a client about the goals of a case, the possible outcomes, the financial considerations of discovery and trial, and the time spent in litigation, and the experience of working with another attorney instead of simply arguing in person, through motions, or in court, has changed both my view of the profession and the roles of lawyers and judges in the judicial system.

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

None

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 MEMPHIS , Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law Juris Doctor, <i>Summa Cum Laude</i> , August 2007-May 2010 GPA: 3.78/4.0 Rank: 2 Honors: Amy Elizabeth Spain Memorial Scholarship Hoffman Scholarship Dean's Award for Oral Advocacy CALI Award: Torts II Activities: Editor-in-Chief, <i>The University of Memphis Law Review</i> National Moot Court Team, Finalist ABA National Appellate Advocacy Team	Memphis, TN
SAMFORD UNIVERSITY , Beeson Divinity School Master of Theological Studies, August 2004-May 2006 GPA: 3.90/4.0	Birmingham, AL
UNION UNIVERSITY Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, August 1999-December 2003 GPA: 3.33/4.0 Honors: Presidential Scholarship (four-year full tuition) Ambassador for the University Activities: Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity: President, Vice President, Rush Chairman Student Government Association: Vice President	Jackson, TN

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

 1981
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13. How long have you lived continuously in the State of Tennessee?

I have resided in Tennessee continuously for the past fourteen years, but also lived continuously in Tennessee for a separate twenty-three-year period. 1981-2004; 2007-2021.

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

I have resided in Fayette County continuously for six years, but also lived continuously in Fayette County for a separate eighteen-year period. 1981-1999; 2015-2021.

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

Fayette 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.

No military service

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.

I have never had a formal complaint, but I have been involved with four Consumer Assistance matters with the Board of Professional Responsibility. Each of these arose out of representing a criminal defendant, and each was resolved after my written response and did not result in any formal complaint or investigation.

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.

Christ Presbyterian Church: Elder (2019-present), Youth Leader (2016-present), Men's Bible Study Instructor (2017-present)

Fayette Academy Board of Trustees: Member (2017-present), Chair of Development Committee (2019-present), Vice-Chair of Board (2019-present)

Dixie Youth Baseball: Assistant Coach from 2017-2021

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.

In college, I was a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon social fraternity, which limited its membership to men. I am not an active member of the fraternity, but I do not intend to resign my alumni status in the fraternity, as I do not believe that university social fraternities that limit their membership to men or women only will hinder my ability to serve as a judge and be fair and equitable to all parties.

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 Bar Association: Member, June 16, 2015 through the present

Fayette County Bar Association: Member, 2015 through the present

Leo Bearman, Sr. American Inn of Court: Member, August 2012 through July 2015

Tennessee Board of Law Examiners Investigatory Committee Member (2017-present)

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.

Super Lawyers: Mid-South Rising Star (2017-2020)

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.

Fayette County Board of Zoning Appeals—Appointed Member; Spring 2019 through the present.

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

Serving as a circuit court judge in the Twenty-Fifth Judicial District provides an opportunity for me to serve the community in which I was raised and in which I am now raising my own family. My experience practicing both civil and criminal law has prepared me for this position, and I will strive to serve with both integrity and humility, treating the lawyers, courtroom staff, witnesses, juries, and litigants with the dignity and respect they deserve. I look forward to the opportunity of working with the recovery court participants as these men and women seek to reclaim their lives with the help of the justice system. In short, this is an opportunity to serve, and I believe I am qualified for the position and am willing to serve if the Governor chooses to appoint me.

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 judgeship I am seeking covers five primarily rural counties in West Tennessee. There are two circuit judges in the district, and these judges handle criminal cases, personal injury and malpractice cases, and other civil matters in which the parties typically request a jury. The court also has exclusive jurisdiction over Tennessee Governmental Tort Liability Act claims. The court is also responsible for the recovery court in those five counties. The district is fortunate to have Judge McCraw continuing to serve as a circuit judge, and I believe my experience in both civil and criminal law will complement his extensive experience on the bench. I believe I can assist him in handling the recovery court and expanding it into Tipton and Lauderdale Counties and will hopefully serve with the same humility, kindness, and professionalism with which Judge McCraw serves.

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. As a criminal defense attorney, and even as a civil attorney, I am often tasked with representing individuals whose actions or beliefs I find reprehensible. But in my position, it is my duty to provide them with the best defense possible and to make every legal argument possible, even when I disagree with the law or know that a proper application of the law could potentially result in an outcome with which I personally disagree. In criminal cases, I have argued motions to suppress, even knowing that the client's charges may be dismissed as a result. And some of the civil actions are even more difficult, such as pursuing a civil judgment or an eviction against someone who is facing financial difficulty. But when the law allows for the legal action in question, my clients are entitled to seek relief, even if seeing the result is not always easy. We are a nation of laws and not men, and our system would not work if judges took the law into their own hands. Seeking redress from the legislature is another means of legal

remedy, and it is not the judge's job to intervene when the legislature has duly spoken. I will not have any issue upholding the law even when I disagree with its substance, and my legal practice has prepared me to handle the situation if it ever arises.

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. Tom Minor: Partner, Minor Johnston Douglas, PLLC

[REDACTED] Somerville, TN 38068

B. Courtney Burnette: Head of School, Fayette Academy

[REDACTED] Somerville, TN 38068

C. John Sartelle: Senior Minister, Christ Presbyterian Church

[REDACTED] Somerville, TN 38068

D. Steven E. Farese, Jr.: Partner, Farese, Farese & Farese, P.A.

[REDACTED] Ashland, MS 38603

E. Russell Reviere: Partner, Rainey Kizer Reviere & Bell, PLC

[REDACTED] Jackson, TN 38301

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 Twenty-Fifth Judicial District Circuit Court 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 17, 2021.



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.

Anthony Blake Neill
Type or Print Name


Signature

6-17-21
Date

029323
BPR #

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