

Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office
3/4/26

Name: RUCHEE JANARDAN PATEL

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(including county) SHELBY COUNTY

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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 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. Your complete application, including both the original and digital copies, must be received by the Administrative Office of the Courts on or before the deadline prescribed in the Notice of Vacancy. 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.

Attorney at Donati Law, PLLC

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

2007 26521

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 2007 26521

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 was the subject of a Board of Professional Responsibility complaint in 2011 that resulted in a sustained complaint and suspended probation. The specifics of the underlying resolution are governed by a non-disclosure agreement, which I am legally and ethically bound to honor. However, I view this period as a profound professional turning point. Seeking to ensure absolute excellence in my practice, I sought the guidance of my attorney, Ron Krelstein, and the invaluable practice mentorship of Judge Bernie Weinman. Under Judge Weinman's mentorship, I fortified my practice management and ethical frameworks. Since that time, I have maintained an impeccable ethical record. In 2015, I elevated my practice to the federal level as a vetted CJA Panel Attorney and I have earned the trust of my peers to be elected to the Memphis Bar Association Board of Directors. This experience gave me a deep, personal understanding of accountability and the resilience required to serve on the bench.

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).

Private criminal defense attorney. Self-employed from 2008 to 2023.

Donati Law, PLLC 2024 to Present

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.

Private criminal defense attorney. State and Federal. Court appointed indigent defense. My present law practice is based at Donati Law, PLLC, and is dedicated to criminal defense litigation across both State and Federal courts. My practice is balanced between private representation and court-appointed indigent defense. A distinguishing component of my current work is my service as a vetted Criminal Justice Act (CJA) Panel Attorney for the United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee, where I am appointed to handle complex, high-stakes constitutional defense. Additionally, I maintain a robust state court practice handling serious felony and misdemeanor charges for both private clients and indigent defendants.

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.

Private criminal defense attorney. State and Federal. Court appointed indigent defense. In the trial courts, I have handled hundreds of misdemeanor and felony cases spanning the entire lifecycle of litigation. Initial bond and preliminary hearings, complex discovery analysis, pre-trial motions, suppression hearings, jury selection, and multi-day jury trials in both State and Federal courts. Because I practice heavily in both jurisdictions, I have developed a deep, practical understanding of procedural rules, evidence, and constitutional law. In the appellate courts, my experience includes drafting and arguing direct appeals, interlocutory appeals, and litigating hearings on petitions for post-conviction relief. In addition to my core criminal practice, my career encompasses experience in civil and transactional matters. I have handled family law matters, managing divorce proceedings from the initial drafting of complaints, marital dissolution agreements, and parenting plans through to final hearings. Furthermore, my years managing my own firm as a solo practitioner provided me with substantial transactional and administrative experience, including contract negotiation, trust account compliance, business development, and active law practice management

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

Appointment to the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) Panel for the United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee, where I have served the Western Division since 2015 and the Eastern Division since 2017. This appointment requires being periodically vetted by the federal judiciary to handle complex constitutional defense where the stakes are at their absolute highest. Successfully navigating the rigid standards of the federal courts, while simultaneously handling hundreds of cases in the state system, provides me with a balanced, multi-jurisdictional perspective. It has taught me how an efficient, strictly managed courtroom should operate to ensure timely justice for all stakeholders.

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

I serve as a court-appointed advocate for emergency and long-term mental health commitments. Having been raised in Bolivar, Tennessee, in Hardeman County, my dedication to this area began early. I started volunteering in the Legal Services department at the Western Mental Health Institute at age fifteen and continued throughout my education. As a practicing attorney, I actively choose to continue accepting these appointments. Representing individuals navigating severe mental health crises within the legal system is a profoundly humbling responsibility. Furthermore, this ongoing advocacy has equipped me with a deep, practical understanding of the intersection between mental health and the courts—an invaluable perspective for a Criminal Court Judge when evaluating cases, assessing defendants, and ensuring the justice system operates with both strict adherence to the law and essential human dignity

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

Current Candidate for Shelby County Criminal Court Judge, Division VIII

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 – 2000 to 2004 – Bachelor of Business Administration

The University of Mississippi School of Law – 2004 to 2007 – Juris Doctor

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

1982

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

1992 to 2004; 2007 to Present

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

2007 to Present

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

Shelby 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.

NA

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.

NA

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.

NA

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. I was the subject of a Board of Professional Responsibility complaint in 2011 that resulted in a sustained complaint and suspended probation. Judge Bernie Weinman was appointed as my practice mentor and suspend probation was successfully completed.

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.

NA

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

NA

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.

NA

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.

Sigma Kappa Sorority, South Main Neighborhood Association

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.

Sigma Kappa Sorority – collegiate women's organization. Alumnae membership only.

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.

Memphis Bar Association – Board of Directors, Criminal Law Section Chairperson

Tennessee Asian American Bar Association – Board of Directors

American Inns of Court – Howell Edmonds Jackson Chapter

Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Federal 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.

Memphis Bar Association Leadership Forum Graduate

Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers Trial College Graduate

Mid-South Super Lawyer and Rising Star

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.

Current Candidate for Shelby County Criminal Court Judge, Division VIII

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

I am seeking a seat on the newly created violent criminal courts to restore structure, public trust, and efficient justice to the 30th Judicial District. Having spent nearly two decades handling hundreds of felony and misdemeanor cases on the front lines of State and Federal criminal courts, I understand that resolving severe offenses requires an objective jurist who respects constitutional rights while firmly managing a docket. Court stagnation disrupts families, harms crime victims, and leaves critical safety issues unresolved. Vetted by federal judges to handle high-stakes constitutional defense as a CJA Panel Attorney, I bring multi-jurisdictional insight

and private-sector efficiency to the bench. I am ready to implement active docket management, hold all stakeholders accountable to Tennessee Supreme Court guidelines, and eliminate case backlogs from day one. I am seeking this appointment to implement active docket management and structural accountability. By utilizing the framework of Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 13 and establishing strict 'Trial Readiness' audits, I intend to safely and swiftly eliminate the multi-year case backlog in Shelby County, ensuring that victims, defendants, and taxpayers are served with timely justice.

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 the office of Criminal Court Judge, Division VIII, for the 30th Judicial District (Shelby County). This court has county-wide jurisdiction over serious felony and misdemeanor criminal offenses and consists of ten judicial divisions. My selection will directly impact the court by bringing a balanced combination of State and Federal criminal trial experience—honed both as a private solo practitioner and a trusted trial attorney at Donati Law, PLLC. As a federally vetted Criminal Justice Act (CJA) Panel Attorney, I will introduce private-sector efficiency and multi-jurisdictional insight to a system currently burdened by stagnation. I am prepared to implement active docket management and enforce strict daily accountability from day one. By decisively addressing multi-year case backlogs, my appointment will restore operational structure, ensure timely justice for victims and families, and rebuild public trust in our judiciary.

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. I firmly believe a judge must uphold the law regardless of personal disagreement with its substance. The role of the judiciary is to apply the law as written by the legislature and interpreted by appellate precedent, not to legislate from the bench. In my practice as a federal CJA Panel attorney, I represented a client charged in Federal court with being a felon in possession of a firearm. The underlying felony that triggered this federal charge was a state conviction for being a habitual motor offender—a statute that the State of Tennessee had already repealed. Personally, I disagreed with using a repealed, non-violent state driving offense as the predicate for a severe federal charge. However, the federal statute was unambiguous; it required recognizing the prior felony conviction as it stood at the time. I could not ignore the law, nor could I change it. Instead, I spent significant time counseling my client—who was understandably frustrated by the conflict of laws—managing his expectations and ensuring he understood how the legal framework applied to his reality. If appointed to the bench, I will bring this same objective discipline to my courtroom. I will faithfully apply the law, ensuring fairness, transparency, and absolute respect for the rule of law.

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. WHITNEY KNIGHT, Hilton, [REDACTED]
B. KAROLINA CALHOUN, Mercer Capital, [REDACTED]
C. JUNI GANGULI, Attorney, [REDACTED]
D. EUGENE LAURENZI, Attorney, [REDACTED]
E. DON DONATI, Attorney, [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 SHELBY COUNTY CRIMINAL 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: 15TH DAY OF JULY, 20 26.

Rakesh J. Patel

Signature



TENNESSEE TRIAL COURT VACANCY COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

511 UNION STREET, SUITE 600
NASHVILLE CITY CENTER