

**Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission  
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office**

3/4/26

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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](http://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.

I am a private attorney practicing primarily in criminal and traffic defense.

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

I was licensed in 2012 under TBPR# 30715.

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 was licensed to practice in Tennessee in 2012 under TBPR# 30715.

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).

Waggoner Law Firm 2012-2013

Wood Donovan PLLC 2013-2014

Main Street Lae Firm PLLC 2014 to present (changed business name to Balestrini, Barnes, Jaber & Wood, PLLC in 2017).

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.

Ninety-five percent of my practice is in criminal and traffic defense. The remaining five percent is made up of orders of protections or creating simple wills for members at my church. The latter is usually performed pro bono.

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.

I began practice handling cases in a variety of areas (criminal defense, traffic defense, personal injury, civil rights, and estate planning). As I grew as an attorney, I learned that I enjoy being in the courtroom, specifically in trial. I have practiced before the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals where I have written briefs and made oral argument on a number of occasions. Due to the volume of criminal and traffic cases, I began winding down my civil practice in 2019 and closed my last civil case that was not an order of protection in 2022. Today, I am in court daily and have conducted countless hearings and argued about eighteen trials. Finally, I regularly sit as special judge in Shelby County General Sessions Courts and Bartlett Municipal Court.

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

I have tried countless bench trials before Memphis City Court as well as over twelve jury trials to verdict in Shelby County Criminal Court.

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

I practiced as a paralegal at Husch, Blackwell, Sanders, PLLC for 16 months prior to attending law school.

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.

Mississippi College School of Law, J.D., 2007-2011

Mississippi College Law Review, production editor, 2008-2011

University of Memphis, B.P.S. paralegal studies, 2005-2007

Southwest Tennessee Community College, A.A.S, paralegal studies, 2001-2005

University of Arkansas, 1997-1999, no degree due to moving back to Memphis

Mid-South Community College, 1996, no degree due to transferring to University of Arkansas

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

██████ 1978

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

1999-present

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

1999-present

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

Shelby

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.

None

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.

Underage driving while intoxicated, 1999, guilty

Reckless driving, 2011, guilty

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.

In 2012, when I left Waggoner Law Firm, I failed to ensure that a traffic ticket client was properly informed about the resolution of her ticket. I settled the matter with the Board of Responsibility by taking additional ethics CLE hours and being placed on diversion for five years in which I could not be found to have breached the code of ethics.

In approximately 2018, a complaint was filed based upon the verbiage in a mail-out advertisement for traffic tickets. I agreed to take an additional three hours of ethics CLEs and the complaint was dismissed.

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.

Immanuel Lutheran Church – Memphis, youth leader

Northeast Shelby County Republican Club

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.

No.

### 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.

26. Tennessee Bar Association

27. Memphis Bar Association

28. Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

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 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.

### ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

About three weeks ago, our church had its annual vacation Bible school. During dinner, our pastor asked me if I had ever considered running for judge. I replied that I am considering running in the next state election but lacked the time right now to campaign. My obligation to my family, my church, and my current trial schedule over the next three months is just too consuming to run for the seats. Coincidentally, within the next week, I received an email notifying the bar the application for the two newly created Criminal Court. I feel that I have the compassion, experience, and discretion for the bench. The victims and defendants in our community need to see that from the bench. I would like to use those talents to make our community stronger.

32. 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)*

Shelby County Criminal Court

33. 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)*

The law is the law. I believe in the separation of powers within our government. It is not a judge's place to make law, but to take the facts of a case and apply the law to them. If a judge were to ignore the law on any issue, where does it stop? Attorneys have also taken an oath to uphold the laws.

I am often confronted with a client who urges me to ignore a law or rule of evidence. Moreover, I have had another attorney urge me to ignore the Rules of Evidence at trial because “you just want the jury to hear it.” In this instance, I was preparing for an aggravated rape trial. The victim in the case has many prior instances of sexual encounters for which I believed the court would rule against my client under Tennessee Rules of Evidence 412. The encouragement was to forego a 412 motion and just ask the victim about it at trial. While I did not necessarily agree that the evidence should be excluded, I counseled that attorney about integrity in the law. I could not imagine abandoning my integrity as an attorney or abandoning the oath I took to uphold those laws.

The quality I find most comforting from a judge is knowing that the judge is going to rule on the law, regardless of what the law is. As an attorney, it allows me to properly advise my client. From a judge’s perspective, it is the job.

## REFERENCES

34. 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. Lessie Rainey, Assistant Shelby County District Attorney

[REDACTED]

B. Pete Duncanson, Associate Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church,

[REDACTED]

C. Tim Francavilla, Judge, Bartlett Municipal Court,

[REDACTED]

D. David Bridges, Walgreens, General Manager (retired)

[REDACTED]

E. John Dolan, 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: July 12, 2026.



Signature



**TENNESSEE TRIAL COURT VACANCY COMMISSION**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**

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