

Tennessee Trial Court Vacancy Commission
Application for Nomination to Judicial Office

1/17/23

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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.

I am presently employed as the President and Owner of the Law Office of J M Dowdy, PLLC., where I practice primarily criminal defense. This entails providing legal representation to individuals accused of committing criminal acts ranging from simple misdemeanor conduct to serious felony offenses. I am also a contract attorney with the City of Memphis, where I prosecute traffic offenses. Lastly, I am a Criminal Justice Act panel attorney in federal court, where I provide representation to individuals accused of committing federal offenses.

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 Tennessee on April 28, 2005. My BPR number is 024144.

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 only licensed to practice law 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).

After the completion of my legal education in 2002, I was first employed by the National Civil Rights Museum as the assistant to the Operations Director. In this role, I worked closely with other museum staff and vendors to ensure efficiency in the museum's day-to-day maintenance and operation. I was later promoted to assistant to the Executive Director. I held this position while studying for the bar exam. In this role, I assisted the Executive Director in preparing presentations for board meetings, conducting benchmark studies with other museums, researching potential funding sources, maintaining the schedule, and performing other duties

assigned to ensure the ED ran the organization efficiently.

After passing the bar, I accepted a temporary position as a Special Hearing Officer with the State of Tennessee in August 2005. The position entailed hearing TennCare appeals. In this position, I was tasked with learning the TennCare benefits programs and the administrative hearing and appeals statutes, rules, and regulations to decide whether individuals were entitled to said benefits or wrongfully terminated from the benefits programs.

Shortly thereafter, I opened my law practice. Initially, I accepted appointed cases at the Shelby County and Carroll County juvenile courts. I have represented countless children as the guardian ad litem and parents' attorney in cases that alleged dependency and neglect against the child. I have handled several bench trials and preliminary hearings and filed and argued motions in my work at the juvenile courts.

Also in 2005, I started accepting appointed cases in general sessions and criminal court until I established myself and started getting private clients to hire me. In my private practice, I have provided criminal defense to numerous clients. I have handled cases ranging from simple misdemeanors to serious violent felonies. Through the years, I have had several jury trials, drafted, filed and argued suppression and bail motions, handled preliminary hearings, investigated cases myself, and some with investigators, conducted several client consultations, stayed in contact with families and loved ones of clients, requested and reviewed hours of discovery with painstaking attention to detail and reviewed hours of body worn camera footage. I have become familiar with the TN Criminal Practice Rules, TN Rules of Evidence, and Criminal Procedure.

In my practice, I have also handled some divorce, child custody, and child support cases.

In 2016, I was appointed to the Criminal Justice Act Panel for the US District Court in the Western District of Tennessee. I was reappointed to the panel in 2019 and then again in 2022. As a panel attorney, I am responsible for representing defendants accused of committing acts in violation of federal law. In this role, I have handled detention hearings, filed and argued pretrial motions, conducted several client consultations, reviewed voluminous discovery, and reviewed and analyzed wiretap and jail call conversations. In this role, I have also become familiar with the federal rules of criminal procedure, evidence, and the US Sentencing Guidelines.

In 2019, I accepted a contract attorney position with the City of Memphis. In this role, I prosecute city traffic offenses. I have handled several traffic matters and several traffic court trials.

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.

I would describe my law practice as general, emphasizing criminal law. State criminal law accounts for about 60 percent of my practice, federal criminal law for about 20 percent, and child and family law for the last 20 percent.

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.

Most of my experience comes from the trial court, where I have handled thousands of general sessions and criminal court cases. I have also handled a state post-conviction. I practice regularly in the federal court and have handled one federal appeals case. I have also handled several administrative cases with the Department of Safety and as a Special Hearing Officer. Lastly, I have handled several Juvenile, Circuit, and Chancery Court cases. However, I have been a constant in the criminal law community.

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

The cases we win, and the high-profile cases, are not always matters of special note. Every case has an impact in some way. That impact may have been learning the nuance of a new law. That impact may have been novel facts of a case that would not leave you. That impact may have been a defendant or a victim who simply left an indelible impression. Anytime justice is served, whether my client has been proven guilty or innocent, is of special note. I have had far too many of those cases to count.

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.

This is my first time applying; however, I pulled a petition last year to run in an election before the legislature abolished the judicial seat.

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.

Southern University A & M College, 1995 through 1999, majoring in Political Science, and received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.

Southern University Law Center, 1999 through 2002, received a Juris Doctor

PERSONAL INFORMATION

12. State your date of birth.

I was born on November 17, [REDACTED]

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

I have lived continuously in the State of Tennessee for 23 years.

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

I have lived continuously in Shelby County for 23 years.

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

I am registered to vote in 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.

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.

Not Applicable

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.

The Board of Professional Conduct is investigating me due to a complaint from a past client. The client had mental health and drug issues along with a long criminal history in Arkansas. The client missed court and was rearrested four times while I handled her cases. I secured rehab with probation for the client, and she entered a plea back in April of last year. Before the rehab facility could pick her up from the jail for treatment, she was picked up by AR on an arrest warrant. She has made several false statements in her complaint, but ultimately, she is upset that AR has charged her with conduct that she feels Tennessee has already convicted her of.

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 had two formal complaints that both resulted in a public censure

In 2019, I received a public censure because in 2013, I represented a client in pursuing a guardianship over a minor child. The final order required the client to place designated funds in escrow, with both the client and I named co-trustees over the funds. Shortly after the ruling was made, the client relocated and did not forward any good contact information to me. I was not able to reach the client. The Board of Professional Responsibility stated that I failed to take any action to facilitate the transfer of the funds and did not respond to subsequent inquiries and directives from the Court and the Clerk and Master concerning this matter. They also stated that I failed to communicate well with the client during the representation.

In 2020, I agreed to facilitate payments on behalf of a client to a commercial lessor in fulfillment of an agreement regarding the client's rent arrears. On March 2, 2020, I signed a trust account check payable to the commercial lessor in partial payment of the client's rent arrears. Through an inadvertent office error, a check drawn on my trust account was delivered to the commercial lessor before I received funds from the client to cover the check. As a result, the check was returned for insufficient funds. The Board of Professional Responsibility stated that I failed to take proper remedial action after becoming aware of the error. I also subsequently deposited personal funds into my trust account to provide enough funds for a replacement check, thereby comingling my personal funds with trust account funds.

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.

Not Applicable

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

I was discharged under Chapter 7 bankruptcy on March 31, 2011.

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.

2013, Case number 1608713 | Dowdy vs Tawanda Williams, suit for unpaid legal fees, judgment granted,

2009, Case number 1358020 | Island Point Homeowners Assoc v. Dowdy, suit for HOA fees, voluntary nonsuit

2010, Case number 1422232 | Island Point Homeowners Assoc v. Dowdy, suit for HOA fees, voluntary nonsuit

2011, Case number 1487209 | Island Point Homeowners Assoc v. Dowdy, suit for HOA fees, voluntary nonsuit

2020, Case number 2058122 | Island Point Homeowners Assoc v. Dowdy, suit for HOA fees, voluntary nonsuit

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 Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority, Inc. I am currently the audit committee co-chair.

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.

Not Applicable

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.

Within the last 10 years, I have been a member of the following: Memphis Bar Association, Ben F. Jones National Bar Association, Memphis Federal Bar Association, and Tennessee 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.

2017 10 Best Attorneys (as published by American Institute for Criminal Law Attorneys)
2010 BVisible Small Business Award for Excellence in community service

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.

Not Applicable

ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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

I have had the privilege to serve my community as a protector of children, a protector of parents' rights, and as a defense attorney. I have obtained a wealth of knowledge through years of work

experience. I have also honed my skills and knowledge by attending several CLE courses. My experience and demeanor can be an additional asset in service to the community from the bench. I am passionate about the system working correctly. That does not mean everyone should go free; it means they should matriculate through a system before fair and impartial judges, allowing them to have their day in court. I am confident I can be that fair and impatient judge who keeps a clear head and calm demeanor.

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 to fill the vacancy of Criminal Court Division 1. This court is one of nine that serve Memphis/Shelby County and hears criminal matters that may be felonies, misdemeanors, and matters bound over from the smaller municipalities in the area. My knowledge of the community and years of experience in private practice and federal court will bring a fresh new perspective on managing and moving cases forward.

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 uphold the law even if I disagree with its substance. I handled a case representing a juvenile who was 15 years old when he was bound over to criminal court to be handled as an adult. I believe there is a reason federal courts generally do not hear juvenile offender cases. I believe there is data out there that suggests juvenile and young offenders should not be housed with adult offenders. I put all personal feelings aside to represent the juvenile and ensure he received the best representation and sentence possible.

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. Mr. John T. Fowlkes, Jr. | United States District Court Judge (WD/TN) [REDACTED]

B. Mrs. Beverly Robertson | Owner - Trust Marketing & Communications | [REDACTED]

C. Ms. Cissy Shelton | Owner - Galler Foods | [REDACTED]

D. Ms. Ann Thompson | retired business owner/family friend | [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] Criminal Court Division I, for the 30th 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: June 4th, 2025.


Signature

When completed, return this questionnaire to John Jefferson at the 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.

Jahari Mabry Dowdy

Type or Print Name

Signature

June 4, 2025

Date

024144

BPR #

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

Not Applicable