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1. What currently motivates you to be a district court judge and how have you prepared for this role?

I have practiced law in District Court for the past 15 years. I enjoy assisting families and have the honor of serving families in both criminal and civil district court. My experience, especially as a trial attorney in family and Abuse/Neglect/Dependency courts, prepares me to continue to serve the families of Durham from day one. I am motivated to be a judge based on what I have experienced and observed in recent years, specifically, I want to be an avenue of access to justice. I am ready and able to address the backlog of cases in family court and Abuse/Neglect/Dependency court. As the county that is last in resolving Abuse/Neglect/Dependency matters within the time standards set by statute, Durham deserves a judge ready to address its needs. My experience also prepares me to decide misdemeanor criminal and traffic matters as well.

2. What do you think is the single barrier to justice and what would you adopt as your judicial philosophy?

I believe that the greatest barrier to justice is access, whether the access is hindered by economic factors, racial factors, cultural differences or gender identification. If a person cannot afford representation, as is often the case in civil courts; or if a person's racial, gender identification, or cultural make-up present additional hurdles to justice, then those individuals are barred from the ideal of equal justice under the law.

My judicial philosophy would be to aim for equal treatment under the law and to do my part to ensure that application of the law is fair and unbiased. I would ensure that anyone that is before me has equal access to available resources when applicable. I would make sure to consider all factors on a case by case basis. My goal is for everyone to leave my courtroom after being fairly heard and with their dignity intact.

3. What biases would be difficult for you to overcome and how will you overcome those biases for the administration of justice?

I do not think that I will have difficulty overcoming biases in the administration of justice. Over the past 15 years, I have been subjected to biased treatment in my advocacy for clients. I have routinely been asked to present my bar card in certain counties in the state. I was labeled as angry or aggressive because of my Low Country,

South Carolina dialect. I have been ignored by male colleagues. I carry these experiences with me as I strive to treat everyone I encounter with respect. These lessons will help me recognize and relate to “different” folks and help me overcome any perception of bias in the administration of justice.

4. Please describe your practice as a lawyer. Describe the areas of your practice and your specialties. If, over time, your practice has evolved or changed, describe the changes. Describe your various client bases as a part of your answer.

When I began practicing law in 2007, I immediately went into private practice. I represented indigent clients in criminal law and clients in family law. It was not until a year into practice that I learned about a special area of juvenile court called Abuse/Neglect/Dependency. This court combined a little of criminal, civil, and family law, depending on the reason behind the removal of a child from home. My practice granted me the opportunity to develop into an experienced trial attorney, able to address the varying needs of the families I serve. My district court practice grants access to domestic violence court, misdemeanor criminal court, family court, juvenile delinquency court, traffic court, child support court, general civil court, and Abuse/Neglect/Dependency court. I work with clients who retain my services, clients who are court-appointed, and clients that I service pro bono. Private practice has allowed me a variety of clients in different areas of law.

5. If your practice is primarily focused on criminal law, how will you address the learning curve associated with learning about civil law? If your practice is primarily focused on civil law, how will you address the learning curve associated with learning about criminal law?

In the past 15 years, I have the honor of serving clients in both civil and criminal cases. While I do not proclaim to know everything, I am both comfortable and confident in my abilities in both civil and criminal courts. In my practice, I routinely stay abreast of new North Carolina Court of Appeals and Supreme Court decisions that impact our laws. I plan to attend trainings and review list serves to stay up-to-date on new laws and/ or their modification. I have extensive trial experience which grants constant utilization of the Rules of Evidence and Procedure. I believe my learning curve will focus more on serving in a different role, as I will need to become accustomed to being the jurist and not the litigator. I believe I have the experience, the knowledge, and the temperament to serve in this capacity.

6. North Carolina incarcerates an extraordinary number of people, including persons convicted of non-violent crimes. Those who are incarcerated are disproportionately people of color. What, if anything, should the legislature and our courts do to address the issues of mass incarceration and racial bias in the administration of justice?

The Legislature should continue to work to implement laws that would prevent over criminalizing of non-violent crimes. As a judiciary, it would be my job to ensure that the laws are followed; however, I would use my discretion to consider racial and socioeconomic bias into my decisions.

7. Should the North Carolina General Assembly abolish the death penalty?

Yes. Our criminal justice system is one of the best systems in the modern world. However, it is an imperfect system that has imprisoned and sentenced to death persons later determined to be innocent. I believe one person falsely convicted or put to death, is one too many. The only solace in a false imprisonment is that the person can later be released. A death sentence, once imposed, cannot be undone. Laws are not only meant to impose punishment, but also to serve as deterrence. I believe it is important to acknowledge how sentences are applied and the implicit bias within sentencing. There is disparity in imposing sentences for the same types of crime among men versus women, young versus old, rich versus poor and Caucasians versus minorities, but especially when the death penalty is imposed. The unfairness of the application of the death penalty is another reason why I believe it should be abolished, or at least a moratorium should be considered.

8. What, if anything, should be done to improve access to justice for people with limited financial means or who mistrust the system? How should courts handle requests to waive court costs, fines, failure to appear fees, probation supervision fees, attorney fees, and bail in criminal court?

I believe in order to improve access to justice for people with limited financial means or to those who mistrust the system is to ensure they are educated on resources that are available to them based on their situation. I also believe that people should be treated with dignity and respect with every interaction with the legal system; whether it be interactions with law enforcement, clerks, magistrates, attorneys, or judges. Additionally, I believe a person's financial standing should not prevent or limit access to the judicial system or prevent fair resolutions of matters. While in most criminal matters a person is entitled to court-appointed counsel, the same is not true in most civil matters, like family court. I believe guardian ad litem should be appointed in custody cases where litigants cannot afford attorneys. A court appointed guardian ad litem in a child custody case investigates what is in the best interest of the minor child and writes a report to submit to the court. A guardian ad litem is a great tool to use in contested custody cases but currently it is only beneficial to parties who can afford it.

As it relates to the waiver of court costs, fines, failure to appear fees, probation supervision fees, and attorney fees in criminal court, I believe cost imposed in any situation should be determine on a case-by-case basis. I believe no costs should be imposed that would cause a person hardship or loss of liberty by non-compliance. I believe there are alternatives to imposing costs, like ordering community service, should be considered. As it relates to bail in criminal court, I believe it should not

be used as pre-punishment but to ensure one's presence in court. On a case-by-case basis, the type of crime and the history of failing to appear should be some of the factors considered in determining bond.

9. What does racial equity mean to you and how does racial equity inform your work as a District Court judge? Have you any special training in issues related to racial disparities and equities?

Racial equity is the process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. I believe as a District Court judge it would be my responsibility to consider multiple factors, including racial equity in every case that comes before me. I plan to review each case on its own merits, and consider if race played a role in any aspect of the case and take that into consideration.

While I have not had any specific training on racial disparities and equities, I incorporate race, socioeconomic status, and education when determining mitigating factors to present to a judge. In addition, I am required to complete 12 hours of Continuing Legal Education annually and many of the trainings I have participated in the past incorporate racial equity. I have handled cases where injustices were present based on race which required me to have those discussions with appropriate parties to address these issue for a fair resolution.

10. What are your thoughts on Durham's current diversion programs? If you believe these programs should be changed in any way please describe how and why.

Diversion programs are great tools in the administration of justice. These programs allow individuals to address underlying issues, receive help where needed, and maintain clean criminal records. I believe the greatest issues facing our diversion programs are lack of funding and oversight. We need to ensure that programs are receiving the necessary funding, and some court intervention, to ensure that participants understand the value of diversion from the criminal justice system.

I believe many of our previous diversion programs should be reinstated. I worked with Durham's Family Treatment Court when it was first initiated. Unfortunately, the program lost its funding. This program focused on parents or guardians with substance abuse history working towards reunification with their children. I also encourage the reinstatement of Life Court which focuses on parents with court involvement for non-payment of child support. Life Court provided resources to assist with employment.

11. What is the most significant challenge we face in our Durham civil court system and what can be done to address it?

There are many challenges facing our Durham civil system. The most significant challenge in the civil court system is access to resolutions. There is a significant

backlog of civil cases especially those in juvenile Abuse/ Neglect/ Dependency court. When families are unable to access court time to resolve these matters it causes families extreme hardship due to delays. Families need access to the court to obtain decisions, decisions that can break, rebuild, and/or redefine families. I believe judges, who set the tone and control the courtroom, must hold parties accountable to time estimates provided to litigate their case and make sure the rules of civil procedure are followed. I believe utilizing virtual hearings and utilizing court time effectively is necessary to address the backlog. Virtual calendar call, or virtual hearings surrounding scheduling or procedural issues are just a few ways to streamline access. When cases are not resolved in a timely manner it causes further chaos and disruption for the family.