

# **MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE**

## **2020 ANNUAL REPORT**



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**MISSISSIPPI  
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE**



**COMMISSION MEMBERS**

JUDGE KENT MCDANIEL, CHAIRMAN  
CORNELIA GAYDEN, VICE-CHAIRMAN  
JUDGE VICKI R. BARNES  
JUDGE JOHN H. EMFINGER  
JUDGE DAVID RYAN BRUHL  
COL. (RET.) SILVANUS JOHNSON  
ROY CAMPBELL, III, ESQ.

**ALTERNATE COMMISSION MEMBERS**

JUDGE SMITH MURPHEY  
JUDGE CYNTHIA BREWER  
JUDGE RICHELLE LUMPKIN  
JUDGE WES CURRY  
JEFFERY M. ADCOCK  
ROBERT GRAVES  
KAREN K. SAWYER, ESQ.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

DARLENE D. BALLARD  
(January – June)

RACHEL L. WILSON



**COMMISSION OFFICES**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi Commission on Judicial Performance was created in 1979 by the Mississippi Legislature and the voters of the State of Mississippi by constitutional amendment. The Commission enforces standards of judicial conduct, investigates and prosecutes allegations of judicial disability and conduct, protects the public from judicial misconduct and disabled judges, and protects the judiciary from unfounded allegations.

The Commission oversees the conduct of the Mississippi Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, Circuit Court Judges, Chancery Court Judges, County Court Judges, Municipal Court Judges, Justice Court Judges and any other officer of any judicial system who performs judicial functions on the state level.

The Commission is composed of seven members; one circuit court judge, one chancery court judge, one county court judge, one justice court judge, two lay persons who have never held judicial office or been members of the bar of Mississippi; and one practicing attorney who has practiced law in the state for at least ten years. An alternate for each member will be selected for each representative class to replace those members who might be disqualified or absent. Each member and alternate serves on the Commission for six year terms.

The composition of the Commission's membership brings a diverse set of viewpoints to ensure that the perspectives of the judiciary, the legal community and the public are considered in determining the outcome of each complaint. The Commission's mandate has always been threefold: to protect the public, enforce rigorous standards of judicial conduct, and to maintain public confidence in the integrity and independence of the judiciary.

The Commission may receive a complaint from any interested party, the most common complainants are: litigants, attorneys, law enforcement officers, and interested citizens who believes a judge has committed misconduct or has a disability affecting his or her ability to serve as a judge. The Commission continually works to take appropriate steps to make itself accessible to the public. Complaints may, of course, be submitted to the Commission's office directly through its website at <https://www.judicialperformance.ms.gov>, email, mail, or by facsimile. All complaints must be in writing; the Commission does not accept oral complaints.

What constitutes misconduct by a judge is largely defined by Section 177A of the Mississippi Constitution and the Mississippi Code of Judicial Conduct. Judicial misconduct can include, but is not limited to, instances of bias, demeanor unbefitting a judge, failing to give all interested parties a full opportunity to make their arguments, and failing to make a decision in a prompt, efficient, and fair manner.

Under the rules that govern its operation, the Commission must investigate any complaint that alleges specific facts that, if true, would constitute judicial misconduct. This investigation is conducted by the Commission staff.

If the Commission concludes that the complaint lacks merit – that there is no evidence of misconduct – then the matter will be dismissed. If a party alleges that a judge has misinterpreted facts or law, the proper forum for a remedy is an appellate court.

Pursuant to the Mississippi Constitution, statute, and the Commission’s own rules, the Commission must operate under strict confidentiality. Complaints only become public record when the complaint has been submitted to the Mississippi Supreme Court for review.

I would like to thank members of the judiciary, court staff, the legal community, and members of the public for their assistance in helping the Commission to fulfill its constitutionally mandated purpose. I must also extend my particular gratitude to the Commission’s staff and to the membership of the Commission, who work tirelessly throughout the year to ensure public confidence in the judiciary and in the judicial system.

If any member of the public, the bar, or the judiciary has questions about the work of the Commission or the contents of this report, he or she is welcome to contact this office.

Sincerely,

Rachel L. Wilson  
Executive Director

## **TYPES OF COMPLAINTS THE COMMISSION MAY CONSIDER:**

### **1. MISCONDUCT**

The Code of Judicial Conduct is intended to establish standards for ethical conduct of judges. It governs the activities of judges both on and off the bench. Judicial misconduct can be divided into several categories.

#### **(A) Improper Courtroom Behavior**

Allegations of improper courtroom behavior may include: demeanor; improper treatment of attorneys, parties, witnesses and others involved in the court process; improper physical conduct; or persistent failure to dispose of court business promptly and responsibly. Examples may include: racist or sexist comments, sleeping on the bench, inattentiveness, or substance abuse. Judges may also be disciplined for administrative missteps such as taking cases under advisement and not ruling in a timely manner.

#### **(B) Improper or Illegal Influence**

Judges should not be swayed by any factor outside of the evidence presented in a trial or hearing that would affect their ability to be fair and impartial. Canon 2B prohibits a judge from letting family, social or political relationships influence their rulings. Canon 3E also prohibits a judge from hearing matters in which he or a family member has an interest in the outcome of a case. Examples of improper influence would include, but not be limited to, the receipt of gifts, bribes, loans or favors. Also included in this category would be ex parte communications that are prohibited under Canon 3B (7). This occurs when a judge talks to one party without the other party being present or aware of the communication.

#### **(C) Improper Conduct Away from the Bench**

The Commentary to Canon 2A reinforces the authority of the Commission to inquire into issues that may occur in the professional and/or personal lives of judges. This can include a wide variety of offenses. Examples may include criminal activity, improper speech or associations, lewdness, or any other activity that would tend to erode public confidence in the integrity of the judicial office.

#### **(D) Other Offenses**

This category could include a wide range of offenses. Some common complaints are: interference with the attorney/client relationship, bias or prejudice, improper campaign activity, making public comments regarding a pending or impending case, disqualification issues or lending the prestige of his office to advance the private interests of others.

## **2. PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DISABILITY**

The Commission also is tasked with reviewing allegations that a judge has become disabled due to physical or mental disabilities, i.e. alcohol or substance abuse, debilitating physical illness, mental illness or dementia. The Commission has the authority to have the judge submit to an examination by licensed physician(s) chosen by the Commission.

## **3. COMPLAINTS OUTSIDE OF THE COMMISSION'S SCOPE**

The Commission frequently receives complaints from litigants who are unhappy with a judge's ruling. The Commission has no authority to settle questions of law or to reverse judicial decisions. That role is strictly within the purview of the appellate courts. In addition, the Commission does not determine whether or not a judge should recuse in a case. That is also up to the appellate courts. Finally, the Commission does not have the authority to entertain complaints against federal judges.

### **THE COMPLAINT PROCESS**

#### **The Complaint**

- Commission receives a written complaint alleging judicial misconduct. Complaint Forms are provided by the Commission via mail, fax or email or can also be found on the Commission's website, <https://www.judicialperformance.ms.gov.Complainants> can also electronically file a complaint on our website.

#### **The Initial Review**

- A staff member reviews the Complaint to determine that the allegations are against a sitting state court judge.
- A case number is assigned to the complaint.
- A letter is sent to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint, providing the case number and the date the Commission will review the complaint.
- Before the Commission meeting, the complaints are mailed to the Commission members for their review.

#### **The Commission Meeting**

- Commission considers the complaint at its regularly scheduled Commission meeting.
- The Commission may dismiss the complaint due to lack of evidence, because it is a matter for appellate review, or for lack of jurisdiction.
- If the Commission determines there is a possibility of misconduct, an investigation is ordered.

#### **The Investigation**

- Witnesses are interviewed, documents are obtained and reviewed and an investigative file

is compiled.

- Investigator has 2 months to investigate the allegations found in the complaint and then report back to the commission at its next meeting.

### **The Commission Meeting**

- Commission dismisses the complaint for the reasons cited above.
- Commission dismisses the complaint but sends a letter of instruction to the judge.
- Commission finds probable cause to file a Formal Complaint

### **The Formal Complaint**

- Judge is served with the Formal Complaint and has a right to an attorney and 30 days to answer the Formal Complaint.
- Judge and the Commission begin settlement negotiations or schedule hearing.
- A Formal Hearing may be held wherein the judge has the opportunity to present evidence and have 2 character witnesses present.
- A three commission member / alternate panel either finds that the judge committed misconduct or dismisses the case.
- If the panel finds the judge has committed misconduct, then the Commission sends its recommendation of appropriate sanction and all pleadings, transcripts, and evidence to the Mississippi Supreme Court
- Mississippi Supreme Court reviews the Commission's findings and either accepts as presented or imposes a greater sanction, lower sanction, or dismisses the case.
- Sanctions Available: Memorandum of Understanding, Private Admonishment, Public Reprimand, Suspension, Fine, or Removal.



### **Summary of Services Provided by Commission Staff:**

In calendar year 2020, the Commission received 239 new complaints against Mississippi Judges. The Commission met six times in 2020. 233 of the 239 new complaints were considered by the Commission during the 2020 calendar year. Of that 233, 101 complaints required an investigation, and in 11 cases formal proceedings were initiated. The remaining 6 cases pending investigation and 29 new complaints received in 2020 will be considered during the 2021 calendar year.

Additionally, in 2020, Commission staff participated in 15 Training Classes as presenters at conferences regarding judicial ethics; participated in 15 mediations; held 22 Settlement Conferences; received 65 complaints that were not in the jurisdiction of the Commission and fielded 1728 telephone calls, and inquiries concerning the judicial system, interpretation of the Code of Judicial Conduct, and questions concerning the complaint process.

Commission Staff also serves as a resource for Mississippi Court Clerks, County Administrators and Judges. The Staff also avails itself to the Community and has participated in numerous outreach programs across the state.

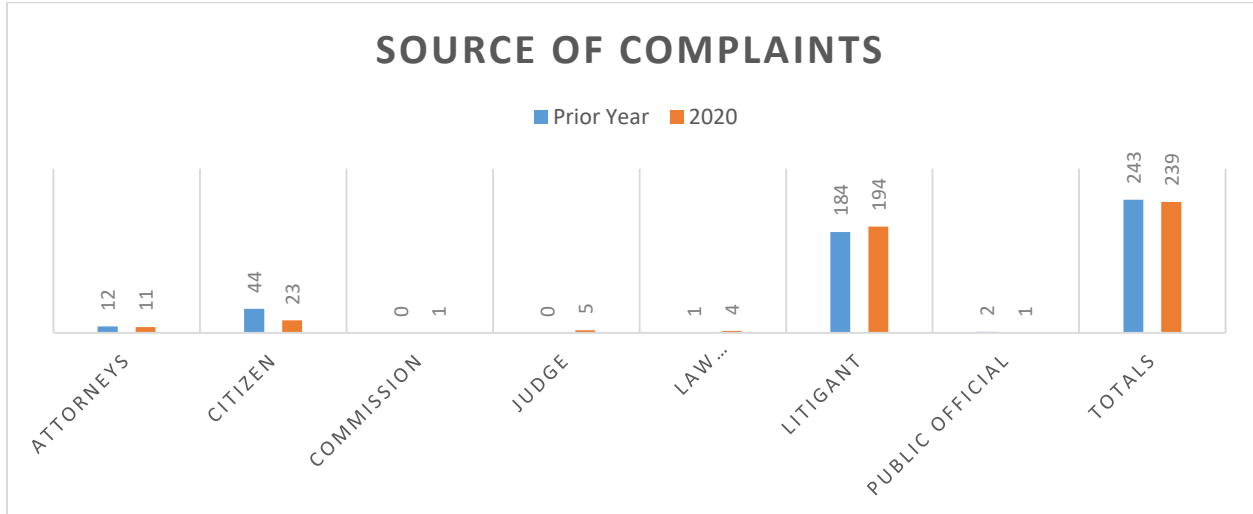
Commission staff also serves as administrative resource for judicial elections, and provides support of the Special Committee on Election Campaign Intervention. The Special Committee rendered five opinions regarding the 2020 judicial elections, and two public statements.

The Commission employs a staff of five including:

Executive Director – Rachel L. Wilson  
Senior Staff Attorney – Vacant  
Staff Attorney - Meagan Brittain  
Chief Investigator - Danny L. Perry  
Office Manager – Elizabeth Thompson

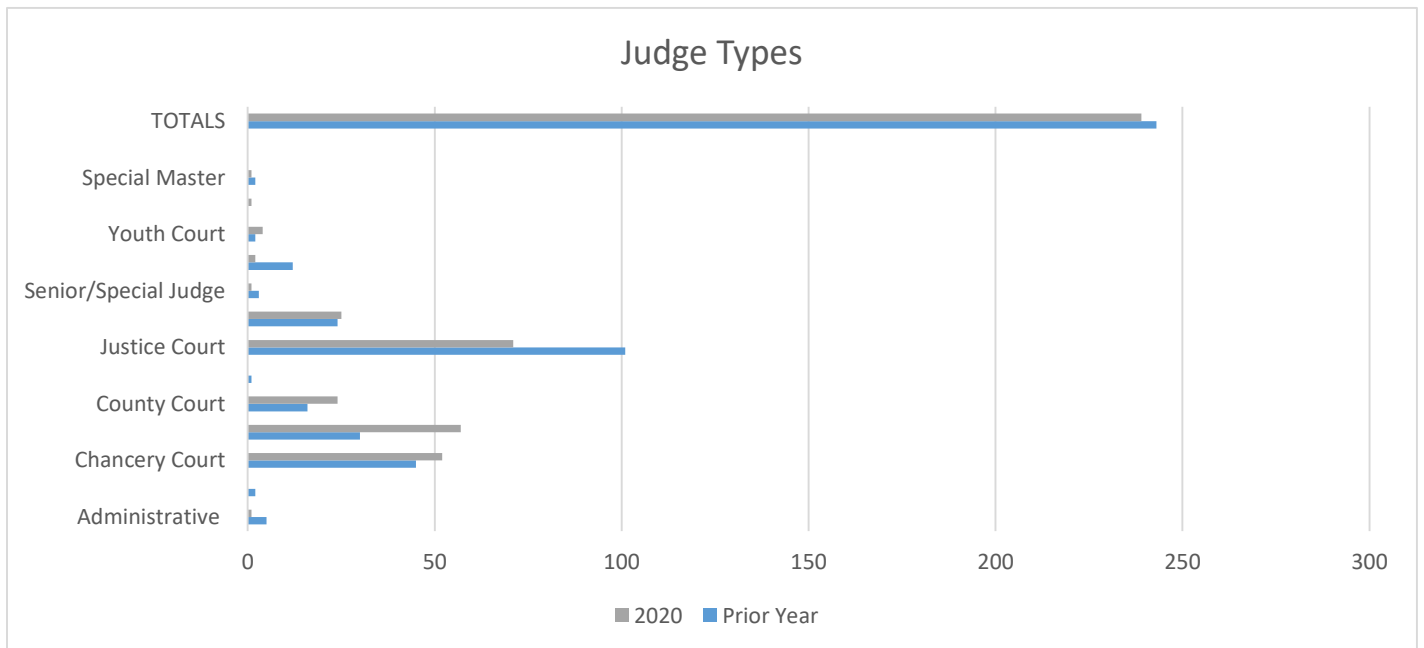
## SOURCE OF THE COMPLAINTS

	2019	2020
Attorneys	12	11
Citizen	44	23
Commission	0	1
Judge	0	5
Law Enforcement	1	4
Litigant	184	194
Public Official	2	1
Other	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>239</b>



## TYPES OF JUDGES RECEIVING COMPLAINTS

	2019	2020
Administrative	5	1
Court of Appeals	2	0
Chancery Court	45	52
Circuit Court	30	57
County Court	16	24
Family Master	1	0
Justice Court	101	71
Municipal Court	24	25
Senior/Special Judge	3	1
Supreme Court	12	2
Youth Court	2	4
Youth Court Referee	0	1
Special Master	2	1
Other	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>239</b>



## DISPOSITION OF COMPLAINTS

	2019	2020
<b><u>Complaints Dismissed</u></b>		
Dismissed:		
Appellate Review	60	69
Lack of Evidence	105	116
Lack of Jurisdiction	4	2
<b><u>Complaints Currently Pending at Commission</u></b>		
Formal Complaint	0	10
Pending Investigation	0	6
New Complaints Pending	0	29
<b><u>Sanctions Imposed</u></b>		
Informal Commission Action	16	5
Memorandum of Understanding	3	2
Resigned/Retired	0	0
Inactive Status	0	0
Private Admonishment	2	0
Public Reprimands/Suspension	2	1
Removed	0	0
Dismissed	0	0
Currently Pending at Supreme Court	0	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>239</b>

## **DISCIPLINARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In 2020, the Commission filed one (1) recommendation for discipline with the Mississippi Supreme Court. All cases before the Mississippi Supreme Court are matters of public record and are reported here without violating the constitutionally required confidentiality.

### **DECISIONS RENDERED BY THE MISSISSIPPI SUPREME COURT DURING THE 2020 CALENDAR YEAR**

#### **Mississippi Commission on Judicial Performance v. Judge Teresa G. Bozeman, 2020-JP-00121-SCT**

The Commission alleged and the Respondent agreed that she: (1) initiated improper *ex parte* communications to investigate a pending civil matter, (2) failed to comply with the statutory limitations of money judgments in justice court, and (3) retaliated against a complainant who filed a complaint with the Commission. Judge Bozeman was suspended from office without pay for 30 days, publicly reprimanded, and fined \$1,000.00.

### **INFORMAL COMMISSION ACTION**

In addition to disciplinary action, the Commission is charged with educating and rehabilitating judges and in accordance with that mission issued 17 cautionary/instructional letters and entered into 2 Memoranda of Understanding.

## **MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Judge Kent McDaniel, Chairman**

From 1989 to 1995, Judge McDaniel served as First Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, prosecuting white-collar crimes and drug cases. He returned to the private practice of law in 1995, forming his own law firm.

He was first appointed to a judicial position in November 1995, when he became the Municipal Judge in Flowood, Mississippi. In September 1997, Judge McDaniel was appointed as Rankin County Court Judge by then governor, Kirk Fordice. He has since been elected to five full terms. Judge McDaniel served with the 20th Special Forces Group (MSANG) from 1968-1973 and with the 112th MP Battalion (MSANG) from 1973-1978 leaving the service with the rank of First Lieutenant. He served as an adjunct faculty member at the Mississippi College School of Law for 25 years teaching trial practice. In 2013, he earned a Doctor of Laws degree from Mississippi College School of Law. Judge McDaniel is the County Court member for the Commission.

### **Cornelia Gayden, Vice-Chairman**

Ms. Gayden is an alternate lay member. She is employed by the McComb School District as a Community Engagement and Communications Coordinator.

Ms. Gayden is a graduate of Louisiana State University where she was a star player for their basketball program. After graduation, she played professional basketball in the United States, Europe and the Middle East. Ms. Gayden also played in the USA Basketball Select Team World University Games in Fuoka, Japan in 1995. She is a three-time recipient of the Madeline Doucet Alumni Award, which is awarded to the outstanding alumni of the year. She was also named Southeastern Conference Great in 2003, Women's Basketball News Service All American in 2000, and Kodak Regional All American in 1994. She is the 3rd all-time leading scorer in the Southeastern Conference and the NCAA all-time leader in 3 point goals (337).

Ms. Gayden is very active in her community serving on the advisory board for the McComb School District, the Mayor's Youth Council Committee, and the Fundraiser Committee chair for the Pine Grove Community Center. Ms. Gayden founded the Raining Three Leadership Academy and Raining Three Hoop School. She has also been a member of the Kiwanis Club, the Pike County Arts Council, the Southwest Medical Foundation, and the Pike County Chamber of Commerce.

### **Judge Vicki R. Barnes**

Judge Barnes earned her Juris Doctorate from the University of Mississippi School of Law. After law school, she practiced law as a solo practitioner and also served as the Municipal Court Judge for the City of Vicksburg. In 1994, Judge Barnes was elected as a Chancery Court Judge and has been re-elected each subsequent term.

Judge Barnes is the recipient of the Judge Constance Baker Motley award. She is a fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation and a former Trustee of the Mississippi Bar Foundation. She is a member of the Mississippi Conference of Judges, Magnolia Bar Foundation, Mississippi Bar Association, American Bar Association and the NAACP. Judge Barnes currently serves on the YMCA Board of Directors and was a former president of that organization. She is the Senior Chancellor for the 9th Chancery Court District. Judge Barnes serves as the Chancery Court member for the Commission.

### **Judge John H. Emfinger**

Judge Emfinger obtained his Juris Doctorate from Mississippi College School of Law in 1980 and earned his M.B.A in 1981. Prior to his judicial election in 2010, Judge Emfinger served for 14 years as an assistant district attorney in the 20th Circuit Court District. For almost 10 years he worked as a special assistant attorney general for the State of Mississippi. Judge Emfinger also practiced law in private practice for seven years. He was first elected as a Circuit Judge for the 20th Judicial District of Mississippi in 2010 and has since been re-elected. Judge Emfinger is the Vice Chair of the Mississippi Conference of Circuit Judges and serves on the Committee on Uniform Criminal Code. Judge Emfinger serves as the Circuit Court member for the Commission.

### **Judge David Ryan Bruhl**

David Ryan Bruhl is a partner in the law firm of Foxworth, Shepard & Bruhl, P.A., in Columbia, Mississippi. He graduated cum laude in 2011 from Mississippi College School of Law, and has worked in private practice since that time. Ryan began his career in Tylertown, Mississippi, and in 2018, joined Foxworth & Shepard in Columbia. His areas of expertise include real estate law, probate law, estate planning and trusts, and corporations.

In 2014, Ryan was appointed Municipal Judge by the Mayor and Board of Aldermen of Tylertown, and in 2015, he was elected as one of the Justice Court Judges for Walthall County. In 2018, Chancellor Debbra K. Halford appointed Ryan to serve as Family Master, Special Master for Commitments and Youth Court Referee for Walthall County. Ryan remains actively involved in various community development projects. He is a Past President of the Walthall County Chamber of Commerce, and is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Walthall County Dairy Festival and Christmas in the Park. Ryan is also a member of the Varnel Masonic Lodge and previously served on the Board of Directors of the Southwest Mississippi Community College Alumni Association. Ryan is married to the former Jennifer Stringer, and they are the parents of two children, Jackson and Jennie Claire. He and his family attend Tylertown Baptist Church. Judge Bruhl serves as the Justice Court Judge member.

**Col. (R) Silvanus Johnson**

Col. Johnson is a retired Medical Services Officer. Colonel Johnson also served as a Special Education and Biology learning strategy teacher at Mendenhall High School. He earned the Mississippi Meritorious Service Award and was named teacher of the year for the 2013-2014 school year. He is a graduate of Jackson State University and was the Senior Assistant Professor of the Military Science Department.

Col. Johnson was the first African American, enlisted soldier, to enter the Mississippi Army National Guard. Additionally, he is the first and only African American member of the Board of Directors for the Mississippi Military Museum at Camp Shelby. Col. Johnson is a life member of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. being selected as the Brother of the Year, obtaining the Outstanding Achievement Award, and many more honorable awards. He is married and the father of two adult daughters and serves as a deacon and treasurer for the Sylvarena Missionary Baptist Church. He currently serves the Commission as an alternate lay member.

**Roy Campbell, III, Esq.,**

Roy D. Campbell, III, is a partner in the Jackson office of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP, a firm of 500 lawyers in the Southeast. He focuses his practice on commercial litigation and product liability. Roy was born and grew up in Greenville, Mississippi, graduated from Greenville High School in 1968, from Davidson College in 1972, and from The University of Mississippi School of Law in 1975. He is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates. Since 2005 he has been listed in Chambers USA and The Best Lawyers in America. He is a past president of The Mississippi Bar, past president of the Capital Area Bar Association and past president of the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Museum of Art. He is a recipient of The Mississippi Bar's Distinguished Service Award and the Capital Area Bar Association's Outstanding Service Award. Mr. Campbell serves the Commission as the attorney member.



## **ALTERNATE MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Judge Smith Murphey**

Judge Murphey joined the 17th Circuit bench in January 2011. The district includes DeSoto, Panola, Tallahatchie, Tate and Yalobusha counties. Judge Murphey previously served as chair, vice-chair and secretary treasurer of the Conference of Circuit Judges. He previously served as an Assistant District Attorney of the 17th Circuit District for almost 15 years. He is former president of the Mississippi Prosecutors Association and former president of the Prosecutors Section of the Mississippi Bar. He taught trial techniques and constitutional law nationally to prosecutors for the National Advocacy Center and the National District Attorneys Association. He has served as an instructor in constitutional law for police cadets at the Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy and Mississippi Justice Court Judges Professional Judicial Development courses. He has been a member of the Project Safe Childhood Task Force. He was a founding member of two multi-disciplinary task forces on child abuse.

Judge Murphey is a member of the Batesville Rotary Club and the Panola Partnership. He is a long-time volunteer at the Panola County Food Pantry. He has served as an elder, deacon, and trustee for the Batesville Presbyterian Church.

Judge Murphey earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Mississippi and a law degree from Mississippi College School of Law. He served for two years as a law clerk for former Supreme Court Justice James L. Roberts Jr. of Pontotoc.

### **Judge Cynthia L. Brewer**

Judge Brewer obtained her Juris Doctorate from Mississippi College School of Law in 1985. She was in private practice for several years. During that time, she served as Municipal Court Prosecutor for the City of Jackson, Mississippi and County Prosecutor for Hinds County, Mississippi, as well as serving as an adjunct professor at the Mississippi College School of Law. Judge Brewer was first elected as County Court Judge in Madison County, Mississippi in 2002. She was later elected as judge in the Chancery Court of Madison County, Mississippi in 2006 and still serves in that capacity. Judge Brewer is in the Judicial Studies Master's Program through the University of Nevada at Reno, National Judicial College where she also serves as an instructor. Judge Brewer serves the Commission as the alternate Chancery Court member.

### **Judge Richelle Lumpkin**

Judge Lumpkin obtained her Juris Doctorate from Mississippi College School of Law in 1990. She was in private practice for 20 years focusing her practice in the areas of criminal defense, family law, personal injury, real estate and general litigation. During this time, she also served as Youth Court Referee and Municipal Court Judge. In November of 2010 she was elected as the first County Court Judge of Pearl River County and currently serves in that position. Judge Lumpkin is a member of the Mississippi Bar Association, the Pearl River Bar Association and a past member of the Mississippi Board of Bar Commissioners. Judge Lumpkin serves as the alternate County Court member for the Commission.

### **Judge Wes Curry**

Judge Curry was elected as a Forrest County Justice Court Judge in 2011. He was appointed as Hattiesburg Municipal Judge in August 2017. He practices law with Curry & Curry PLLC in Hattiesburg, MS. Judge Curry served as president of both the Hattiesburg Area Young Lawyers and the South Central Mississippi Bar Association. He serves as the SCMBBA representative on the board of Mississippi Legal Services, and on the Mississippi Board of Bar Commissioners. Judge Curry attended the University of Mississippi for both undergraduate and law school. During law school, he served as a law clerk for Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Michael Sullivan. He later served as a law clerk for Judge Billy Bridges of the Mississippi Court of Appeals. Judge Curry is a member of First Presbyterian Church, where he has served as a deacon and currently serves as an elder. Judge Curry serves the Commission as the alternate Justice Court Judge member.

### **Jeff Adcock**

Jeffery Adcock is a native of Biloxi, Mississippi and graduated from Mississippi State University with a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Business Administration. After earning a Master's of Business Administration, he moved to Jackson, Mississippi. After a career in state government that included a variety of positions and responsibilities in several different agencies, he became the Director of Administration for the State Auditor's Office. After serving in this position under four different State Auditors, Mr. Adcock retired from state government in 2009. After retirement from state government, Mr. Adcock has been involved in real estate management and investment. Mr. Adcock serves the Commission as an alternate lay member.

### **Robert (Bob) Graves**

Bob Graves graduated from Winona High School, Mississippi State University, and Mississippi College School of Law. He was a Senior Vice President with Merrill Lynch in the Jackson office and retired in 2002. He currently serves as an Arbitrator of Disputes for the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA). In addition, Bob raises Angus cattle on his farm in Carroll County.

As a Rotarian he is recognized as a multiple Paul Harris Fellow, a Paul Harris Society Member, a Major Donor, and a Rotary Foundation Benefactor. He is a member of the Winona Rotary Club. He served as District Governor in 2011-12.

Mr. Graves is a veteran and has been a member of American Legion Post 52 since 1969. He is a member of the Post Oratorical Committee and the Boys State Committee. He serves as the alternate lay member of the Mississippi Commission on Judicial Performance.

Bob is married to the former Carole Watts. They are members of the First Baptist Church of Winona.

### **Karen K. Sawyer**

Ms. Sawyer is an honor graduate from the University of Texas with a Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing. She received her Juris Doctorate cum laude from Tulane Law School in 1992.

She is a shareholder at Copeland, Cook, Taylor and Bush, P.A. (Gulf Coast Office) where her practice is primarily civil litigation with a focus on medical malpractice, general liability and insurance coverage matters. She is also a certified mediator.

Ms. Sawyer is a member of the Harrison County Bar, the Mississippi Bar and the American Bar Association. She volunteers as a facilitator in the annual James O. Dukes Professionalism Task Force Program. Ms. Sawyer served as past chair of the Women in the Profession Committee and is a member of the Mississippi Women's Lawyer Association. Currently she serves on the Bench Bar Committee and is a Bar Commissioner for the Second Judicial District, Post 1. Ms. Sawyer was admitted as a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation in 2003 where she served as Trustee and President. She is also a member of the Russell-Blass-Walker Chapter of the American Inns of Court. Ms. Sawyer has received the Alonzo Westbrook Public Service Award in 2008, was named one of the Women Trailblazers by the Women in the Profession Committee in 2012 and received the Mississippi Bar's Distinguished Service Award for 2012-2013. In July, 2015, she was named the Susie Blue Buchanan Award winner by the Women in the Profession. In addition, she serves on the Board of Directors of the South Mississippi Aids Task Force, the League of Women Voters, Mississippi Medical Alliance,

and the Great Southern Club. She is currently serving on the Commission as the alternate attorney member.