

Supreme Court appoints special judge for Hinds County Circuit Court

January 24, 2008

The Mississippi Supreme Court has appointed a third special judge to assist the Seventh Circuit Court of Hinds County with its criminal docket, and will soon appoint a fourth.

Former Hinds County Circuit Judge William F. Coleman Jr. of Jackson was appointed effective Feb. 1 for a six-month term. Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. filed the appointment order Jan. 24.

The Supreme Court's order appointing Judge Coleman says, "Having fully considered the matter, the Court finds that the appointment of an additional special judge is proper and warranted by the overcrowded docket of the Seventh Circuit Court District."

Judge Coleman as a retired judge will work part-time. He will hear criminal cases assigned by Senior Circuit Judge Swan Yerger.

Judge Coleman is the third special judge appointed by the Supreme Court to assist the Hinds County Circuit Court. Retired Hinds County Circuit Judge L. Breland Hilburn of Jackson and retired Court of Appeals Judge Billy G. Bridges of Brandon work as part-time judges hearing criminal cases.

Chief Justice Smith said, "The appointment of Judge William Coleman continues our efforts to assist the Hinds County criminal justice system in expediting and moving the older cases on that court's docket. We will continue to examine Hinds County's needs and other means which may be utilized to further assist the people of Hinds County."

Chief Justice Smith said that the Supreme Court will soon appoint a fourth special judge for Hinds County Circuit Court.

The fourth judicial appointee will work as a full-time judge. The three previous appointments are part-time.

State law limits retired special judges' annual earnings to 25 percent of the current salary for a chancery or circuit court judge. Chancery and circuit judges earn \$104,170 per year. Salary for retired special judges is calculated based on days of service at a rate of 1/260 of the current salary in effect for the judicial office.

Funding for the soon to be named full-time judge and support staff will come from a \$3.5 million federal law enforcement grant announced by Gov. Haley Barbour on Jan. 7. The grant will also pay for two assistant district attorney positions, a public defender and support staff as well as a law enforcement investigations team.

Funding for the part-time positions of Judges Coleman, Bridges and Hilburn comes from a separate \$160,000 federal grant secured by the Governor in 2006.

Judge Hilburn was appointed by the Supreme Court as a special judge for Hinds County Circuit Court on July 26, 2004. Judge Bridges was appointed by an order filed Aug. 29, 2007.

Judge Coleman retired from the Seventh Circuit Court on Dec. 31, 1996, after 20 years as a circuit court judge.

Judge Hilburn retired May 31, 2002, after 30 years on the bench, 21 of that as a judge of the Seventh Circuit. The district previously included Hinds and Yazoo counties.

Judge Bridges retired Dec. 31, 2005, after 11 years of service on the Mississippi Court of Appeals. He previously served as a chancery judge of the Twentieth Chancery District of Rankin County, as district attorney for the Twentieth Circuit Court District of Rankin and Madison counties, and as Rankin County prosecuting attorney.

All three judges since their retirement have accepted appointments as special judges in individual cases across the state.

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