

Commission on Judicial Performance has new leader, new members

February 20, 2015

Circuit Judge Lee J. Howard of Starkville became chair of the Mississippi Commission on Judicial Performance on Feb. 13. He previously served as vice-chair.

Judge Howard takes the place of former Commission Chair H. David Clark II of Forest. Chancellor Clark left the Commission in December after 15 years of service. He was chairman for the past five years.

Rick J. Coulter of Columbia is the new vice-chair of the Commission. Coulter, a Farm Bureau Insurance agency manager, is a lay member of the Commission. He began his service as an alternate member in 2006. He became a member in 2012. The chair and vice-chair are selected by the members of the Commission.

Chancery Judge Vicki Barnes of Vicksburg was recently appointed as a member of the Commission after having served for six years as an alternate member. Rankin County Court Judge Kent McDaniel of Brandon was appointed as a new member of the Commission. Judge McDaniel took the position previously held by Lamar County Court Judge William E. Andrews III of Purvis, whose six-year term ended in December.

Chancery Judge Cynthia Brewer of Madison County and Madison County Court Judge Steve S. Ratcliff III of Madison were appointed as new alternate members. Judge Ratcliff took the alternate member position previously held by Harrison County Court Judge Robin A. Midcalf of Gulfport, whose six-year term ended in December. An alternate takes the place of a member who is not able to participate in a particular judicial discipline case.

Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves recommended Judges Barnes and Brewer. House Speaker Philip Gunn recommended Judges McDaniel and Ratcliff. Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. made the appointments in orders filed on Jan. 6 and Feb. 3.

The terms are for six years, ending in December 2020.

The Commission on Judicial Performance investigates allegations of judicial misconduct and makes recommendations for discipline to the Mississippi Supreme Court. The Commission includes seven members and seven alternates. Members include a circuit judge, a chancellor, a county court judge, a justice court judge, a practicing attorney and two lay persons. An alternate is selected for each position.

Judge Howard served for six years as an alternate member of the Commission, and has been a member for the past five years. He has served as a circuit judge in the Sixteenth Circuit Court District since 1989. The district includes Clay, Lowndes, Noxubee and Oktibbeha counties.

Judge Barnes has served as a chancery judge in the Ninth Chancery District since 1995. The district includes Humphreys, Issaquena, Sharkey, Sunflower, Warren and Washington counties. She is a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation and a former foundation trustee. She serves on the YMCA Board of Directors and is former president of the board.

Judge McDaniel was appointed to the Rankin County Court bench in 1997. He is chair of the Conference of County Court Judges. He was Flowood Municipal Court Judge 1995-1997. He served as First Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi 1989-1995. He is former director of the Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy.

Judge Brewer has served as a chancellor of the 11th Chancery District since 2007. The 11th Chancery is made up of Madison, Leake, Holmes and Yazoo counties. She periodically serves as a group facilitator and instructor at the National Judicial College. She is former chair and vice-chair of the Conference of Chancery Judges. She previously served for four years as Madison County Court and Youth Court Judge. She served on the Commission for Study of Domestic Abuse Proceedings. Before she was elected to the bench, she served as a special master in chancery court, and as a municipal, county and youth court prosecutor in Hinds County.

Judge Ratcliff has served as Madison County Court and Youth Court Judge since 2011. He served on the state Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force. Before he was elected, he practiced law for 20 years in state and federal courts. He also served as a volunteer attorney for low-income people through Mission First Legal Aid.

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