

Commission on Judicial Performance has new leaders, new member

February 19, 2016

Rick J. Coulter of Columbia is the new chairman of the Commission on Judicial Performance, and Circuit Judge James L. Roberts Jr. of Pontotoc is vice-chair. The judicial watchdog agency elected officers on Feb. 12.

Circuit Judge Lee J. Howard of Starkville left the commission after 12 years of service – six years as an alternate and six years as a member. He was chairman in 2015, and previously served as vice-chair.

Circuit Judge John Emfinger of Brandon was appointed as a new alternate member.

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. An alternate takes the place of a member who is not able to participate in a particular judicial discipline case.

Coulter previously served for a year as Commission vice-chair. The Farm Bureau Insurance agency manager is a lay member of the Commission. He has served on the Commission since January 2006, starting as an alternate member. He became a member in January 2012.

Judge Roberts has served at every level of the state judiciary. He has been Circuit Judge of the seven-county First Circuit District since January 2007. The district includes Alcorn, Itawamba, Lee, Monroe, Tishomingo, Pontotoc and Prentiss counties. He previously served on the Supreme Court for seven years, resigning to run for governor. He then served as Municipal Judge in his hometown, Pontotoc. His early career included 12 years as a county prosecutor and four years as Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety. He served as a chancellor of the First Chancery District for four years before he was elected to the Supreme Court.

Judge Emfinger has served as a circuit judge of the Twentieth Circuit District of Rankin and Madison counties since January 2011. He served for 14 years as an assistant district attorney for the Twentieth Circuit District. He worked for nearly 10 years as a special assistant attorney general, including as director of the attorney general's Public Integrity Division. He worked for a year as a staff attorney in the office of the Mississippi Secretary of State.

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