

SUPREME COURT

Chief Justice Loretta H. Rush
Indiana Supreme Court
311 State House
200 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2732



OF INDIANA

December 27, 2023

Via Email and Hand Delivery

The Honorable Eric J. Holcomb
Governor of Indiana
c/o Sharon Jackson, Deputy General Counsel
200 W. Washington Street, Statehouse Room 206
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor Holcomb:

The Marion County Judicial Selection Committee met on Friday, December 15, and on Monday, December 18, 2023, and selected six nominees for two vacancies on the Marion Superior Court due to the retirement of the Honorable Heather A. Welch, effective February 2, 2024, and the passing of the Honorable Shatrese M. Flowers. On behalf of the Committee, and pursuant to Indiana Code section 33-33-49-13.4, we submit to you the candidates the Committee found to be the most qualified for each vacancy.

In selecting these candidates, the Committee evaluated and weighed the nonexclusive list of statutory factors, including legal education, activities in public service, efforts and achievements in improving the administration of justice, diversity, legal experience and reputation as a trial lawyer or judge, and probable judicial temperament.

For the vacancy created by the retirement of the Honorable Heather A. Welch, the Committee nominates the following three candidates:

Magistrate Pauline A. Beeson
Magistrate Marie L. Kern
Magistrate Terrance T. Tharpe

For the vacancy created by the passing of the Honorable Shatrese M. Flowers, the Committee nominates the following three candidates:

A. Richard M. Blaiklock, Esq.
Magistrate Tara Y. Melton
Magistrate James K. Snyder

On behalf of the Committee, we offer summaries of each candidate's qualifications in the order listed above.

Magistrate Pauline A. Beeson

Born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, Magistrate Pauline “Polly” A. Beeson has spent the last eight years of her legal career with the Marion Superior Court—first, in court administration, and, beginning in February 2022, as a Magistrate in the Family Division. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Management with a minor in Marketing from Purdue University in 2003. Before law school, she worked as a probation assistant at the Tippecanoe County Probation Department and later as a paralegal at the Marion County Public Defender Agency. Magistrate Beeson then earned her Juris Doctorate from Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law in 2008. Upon graduation, she returned to the Public Defender Agency where she worked as a Deputy Public Defender, handling a varied caseload. She was promoted to D-felony court in 2009 and practiced there until 2012 when she entered private practice.

In private practice, Magistrate Beeson first worked at a small firm in Indianapolis. Later, she formed Russell & Weitzman where she continued to practice law in courts around the state involving criminal defense, juvenile law, and family law. While in private practice, Magistrate Beeson also worked part-time for the Public Defender Agency with cases involving child in need of services (CHINS), termination of parental rights (TPR), and juvenile delinquency.

Magistrate Beeson left private practice in 2015 when she began her career at the Marion Superior Court as Director of the Arrestee Processing Center. In 2017, she shifted into a different role as a staff attorney, where she researched and proposed changes for systemic improvements to court operations, staffed judicial committees, and served as the point person for most legal matters concerning the court and its judges, including requests for access to public records and defending claims. Then, in 2021, Magistrate Beeson became the term manager to support each of the three term judges who chaired the Civil, Criminal, and Family Divisions. In this role, she oversaw two projects with the National Center for State Courts, which resulted in a final report of recommendations that led to the development of the new Family Division.

In February 2022, Magistrate Beeson was appointed as Juvenile Magistrate and assigned to the recently created Family Division. Her docket includes cases involving CHINS, TPR, juvenile delinquency, adoptions, guardianships, dissolutions, protective orders, and paternity.

Off the bench, Magistrate Beeson was appointed in July 2022 to serve on the Judicial Conference of Indiana’s Child Welfare Committee. And in July 2023, Magistrate Beeson was selected as one of five judicial officers to participate in the first cohort of Thought Kitchen’s *The Inner Work of Judging*, a judicial wellness program funded by the Indiana Supreme Court. Magistrate Beeson also regularly presents continuing legal education seminars in which she trains attorneys and judges on various topics, including e-filing in Odyssey, rules on access to court records, and remote hearings. She is an active member of the Indiana Judges Association, the Indiana State Bar Association, and the Indianapolis Bar Association, where she has had many leadership roles.

Magistrate Marie L. Kern

Magistrate Marie L. Kern has been a judicial officer in Marion County since 2008. A life-long resident of Marion County, Magistrate Kern earned her Bachelor of Arts from Indiana University Bloomington in 1994 with a dual major in English and Criminal Justice. And in 1998, she earned her Juris Doctorate from Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law. During law school, Magistrate Kern served as a certified legal intern, working in traffic court with the Marion County Public Defender Agency where she continued her employment after graduation.

At the Public Defender Agency, Magistrate Kern appeared before judges in various courts, including those dealing with domestic violence cases, felony drug offenses, and major felonies. From 2001 to 2008, Magistrate Kern built a diverse legal background in private practice, initially with Kiefer & McGoff and later as a solo practitioner within an association of attorneys. During this period, she handled a range of family law matters while also focusing on criminal defense. After securing a public-defender contract, she served defendants across major felony courts, concurrently developing her own private criminal defense practice. Throughout her career in practice, Magistrate Kern tried approximately 65 jury trials and nearly 450 bench trials in both criminal and family law proceedings.

As a judicial officer, Magistrate Kern has served in criminal courts and in family courts, with the last twelve years focused on family law adjudication. In January 2015, she was appointed Chief Magistrate in the Marion Circuit Court's Paternity Division where she oversaw court staff and served as a mentor in the division to other judicial officers. In January 2021, Magistrate Kern returned to the Marion Superior Court where she now presides over a family law docket in the newly created Family Division.

In August 2023, the Family Division underwent a reorganization to facilitate the establishment of two new family courts. As a result, Magistrate Kern was appointed by the Family Division leadership to assume a newly created role—overseeing the Family Facilitation Center. In this capacity, Magistrate Kern manages a team of six staff members and has been tasked with initiating and supervising the inaugural Family Division Hearing Court. Magistrate Kern is also actively engaged in enhancing and expanding programming and services within the Family Division for families involved in litigation.

Off the bench, Magistrate Kern previously served on the Judicial Conference of Indiana's Domestic Relations Committee, and she currently serves on the Domestic Relations Benchbook Committee. Magistrate Kern has been a member of the Indianapolis Bar since 2013. As an engaged member, she currently serves as the vice chair of the Family Section's Executive Board, and in October 2023 she became the chair-elect for the Family Section and will serve in that role until December 2024. Magistrate Kern has also presented to colleagues at over 50 continuing legal education seminars and other trainings on a variety of family law topics.

Magistrate Terrance T. Tharpe

A life-long resident of greater Indianapolis, Magistrate Terrance T. Tharpe has been a judicial officer on the Marion Superior Court since December 2022. Magistrate Tharpe obtained his Bachelor of Arts in English Literature in 2000 from Wabash College, where he was a President's Scholar. And in 2003, he earned his Juris Doctorate at Indiana University Maurer School of Law, where he was an ICLEO Fellow and a Managing Editor of the *Federal Communications Law Journal*.

Upon graduating law school, he had a brief stint as a solo practitioner before becoming a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney at the Marion County Prosecutor's Office in 2004. While there, he worked his way up, eventually being promoted to Chief Felony Firearms Prosecutor and Assistant Supervisor in the felony narcotics unit. He prosecuted Level 6 felonies ranging from robberies and burglaries to murders.

From January 2013 through January 2016, Magistrate Tharpe served as a law clerk for Judge Rudolph R. Pyle, III, at the Court of Appeals of Indiana, where he conducted legal research and writing for criminal and civil appeals, drafted bench briefs, and served as a bailiff during oral arguments.

From January 2016 to December 2018, Magistrate Tharpe served as a staff attorney at GEICO, where he defended personal injury and property damage lawsuits throughout the state. In December 2018, Magistrate Tharpe returned to the Prosecutor's Office to serve as Chief Counsel, managing the office's budget, civil litigation matters, and human resources. And in February 2020, he was promoted to Chief Trial Deputy—statutory successor to Prosecutor Ryan Mears—where he was responsible for the office's criminal functions, technology initiatives, and other issues as part of the leadership team. Magistrate Tharpe has sat as first or second chair in 31 criminal jury trials and has participated in at least 100 bench trials.

Since December 2022, Magistrate Tharpe has served as a magistrate in the Marion Superior Court. His regular assignment is with the Initial Hearing Court where he makes initial probable cause determinations, sets bonds, conducts initial hearings, and rules on search-warrant requests. He has also covered court hearings for judges, when requested, involving pretrial conferences, guilty pleas, and sentencing.

Off the bench, Magistrate Tharpe is active in the Bar and the Indianapolis community. He is a Life Member and Past President of the Marion County Bar Association and serves on the Board of Directors of the Indianapolis Bar Foundation. Since 2014, he has served as a Facilitator for Project MR. (Male Responsibility), a program through the Center for Leadership Development that empowers and prepares young men to lead productive lives. In 2020, the Center recognized Magistrate Tharpe as one of the year's top five facilitators. He is also a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity and has participated in service projects for the March of Dimes, the Andrew J. Brown Academy, and the Northwest Civic Association.

A. Richard M. Blaiklock, Esq.

Born in England, Andrew Richard (“Rich”) Musgrove Blaiklock moved from a small village in central England to Indiana in 1978 when he was nine years old, later becoming a naturalized United States citizen in 1991. In 1990, Mr. Blaiklock earned his Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Hanover College. After college, Mr. Blaiklock had a short stint as a case worker at the Marion County Department of Public Welfare - Child Protection Services. And in 1991, he transitioned to the Marion County Juvenile Court where he worked as a probation officer, and later as a supervisor, until 1995.

While working full-time, in 1993, Mr. Blaiklock enrolled as an evening student at Indiana University McKinney School of Law. During law school, Mr. Blaiklock worked full-time as a law clerk at Lewis Wagner, LLP from 1995 to 1996, as a Summer Associate at what is now Ice Miller LLP in 1996, and then as a law clerk at Ice Miller from 1996 to 1997. In 1997, Mr. Blaiklock earned his Juris Doctorate, graduating *summa cum laude*. During law school, Mr. Blaiklock was on the Dean’s List from 1994 through 1997, received four scholarships, and served as Executive Notes Editor for the *Indiana Law Review*.

After law school, Mr. Blaiklock worked in Ice Miller’s litigation section. In 2001, he returned to Lewis Wagner because of a desire to have a broader practice that included non-litigation business work. At Lewis Wagner, he became an income partner in 2006 and an equity partner in 2009. Since then, he has held senior leadership roles at the firm, including on its finance and executive committees. And he has served as the firm’s Managing Partner since 2022. Mr. Blaiklock specializes in commercial litigation, covering a range of issues including First Amendment issues involving billboard companies; disputes involving contracts, trade secrets, noncompete agreements, and fiduciaries; cases involving the Indiana Patient’s Compensation Fund; and appellate advocacy in state and federal courts. Mr. Blaiklock has had six oral arguments before the Indiana Supreme Court, several oral arguments before the Court of Appeals of Indiana, nine oral arguments before the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, and one oral argument before the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. Mr. Blaiklock had two jury trials while at Ice Miller and approximately 40 bench trials in state and federal courts.

In 2011, Mr. Blaiklock received the Indiana State Bar Association’s Civility Award for outstanding civility and professionalism. Since 2013, Mr. Blaiklock has raised money for the Leukemia Lymphoma Society and served on its board of directors from 2017 through 2019. In 2017, he received the Society’s “Man of the Year” award for helping to raise over \$225,000 in ten weeks. He is also a member of the Indianapolis Bar, currently serving on the Bar’s Appellate Institute, and has volunteered for three mock trial arguments during the past year.

Magistrate Tara Y. Melton

A native of Pensacola, Florida, Magistrate Tara Y. Melton has served as a Magistrate in the Marion Superior Court’s Family Division since 2021. She earned her Associate of Arts in General Studies from Pensacola Junior College in 1988, graduating *cum laude*. And she earned

her Bachelor of Science in Agri-Business with a minor in Economics from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in 1991, graduating *cum laude*. In 1994, Magistrate Melton received her Juris Doctorate from Florida State University College of Law. During law school, she served in the Student Bar Association, the Black Law Student Association, and the Juvenile Law Clinic.

Magistrate Melton has been licensed to practice law for 27 years and has been admitted to the Bars of several states, including Indiana (2008), Florida (1995), and Maryland (1999). Before moving to Indianapolis in 2007, Magistrate Melton worked in Florida and Maryland as a legal aid, at a law firm, and at various government agencies, including the Department of Children & Families in Panama City.

In 2007, Magistrate Melton accepted a staff attorney position at Lee Cossell & Feagley in Indianapolis and stayed in that role until 2011. From 2008 to 2016, Magistrate Melton assisted the not-for-profit Fathers and Families Center where she advocated for nonresident fathers in child welfare court by holding monthly legal workshops to help fathers understand the legal process. From 2011 to 2017, Magistrate Melton worked for the Marion County Public Defender Agency, first as a contract attorney and later as a full-time attorney. At the end of 2017, Magistrate Melton shifted to a new role at Child Advocates in Indianapolis, first as a permanency facilitator and mediator and later as Director of Mediation. Prior to being appointed to the bench, Magistrate Melton also served as a Judge Pro Tempore in the small claims courts of Center Township and Lawrence Township in Marion County.

In 2021, Magistrate Melton was appointed as a Magistrate in the Family Division of the Marion Superior Court. She presides over weekly CHINS and juvenile delinquency dockets, which includes fact-finding trials, TPR trials, and motion hearings. She also presides over both final and motion hearings for cases involving dissolution, paternity, adoption, guardianship, and protective orders.

Off the bench, Magistrate Melton is a member of the Indiana Judges Association, the Marion County Bar Association, the Indianapolis Bar Association, and the National Bar Association. In July 2023, she was appointed to the Judicial Conference of Indiana's Child Welfare Improvement Committee. She is also a regular speaker and panelist on various legal issues, providing training at continuing legal education seminars and pursuing involvement at high-school and collegiate mock trial competitions. And, since 2021, Magistrate Melton has provided a judicial perspective while serving as an appointed member to the Judicial Conference of Indiana's Ethics and Professionalism Committee. She is a mentor to youth, a former board member to not-for-profits that serve the community, and a current member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Magistrate James K. Snyder

Born in New Castle, Indiana, Magistrate James K. Snyder has served as a judicial officer on the Marion Superior Court since 2015. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science

from Franklin College in 2003 and his Juris Doctorate from Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School in 2006. Right after law school and before passing the bar exam, Magistrate Snyder became a law clerk at the Marion County Prosecutor's Office, where he staffed their criminal alert hotline and later became a certified legal intern in the Municipal Division.

After passing the bar exam, Magistrate Snyder served as a Deputy Prosecutor at the Prosecutor's Office until April 2007. He then had a short stint in private practice from 2007 to 2008, where he handled civil litigation, family law, workers compensation, and criminal law. During this time, Magistrate Snyder also joined the Marion County Public Defender Agency. As a Deputy Public Defender, Magistrate Snyder was initially assigned to the Misdemeanor Division and later served in both the D Felony and Major Felony Divisions, while being a team leader from 2012 to 2015.

In March 2015, Magistrate Snyder became a Commissioner at the Marion Superior Court and spent his first year working the overnight shift with the Arrestee Processing Center. In May 2016, Magistrate Snyder moved to Criminal Court 20, which was Indiana's highest volume criminal court as a Major Felony Gun and Drug Court.

In January 2020, Magistrate Snyder became a Magistrate and has remained in the Major Felony Division, presently serving in Courts 28 and 32. Since the passing of Judge Shatrese Flowers, Magistrate Snyder is the only judicial officer in Court 28. Additionally, since April 2023, Magistrate Snyder has served in the Initial Hearing Court, which involves starting early in the morning to review time-sensitive search warrants and probable cause findings. Magistrate Snyder has tried 108 criminal jury trials, including 74 as a judicial officer and 34 as a defense attorney.

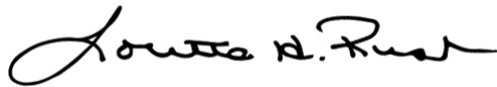
From 2016 to 2017, Magistrate Snyder oversaw the Marion Superior Court's continuing legal education program, serving as the Education Coordinator. From 2016 to 2022, he was a volunteer member of the Indiana Judges Association Criminal Instructions Committee, which was responsible for annually updating the Pattern Criminal Jury Instructions. Magistrate Snyder currently serves on the Judicial Conference of Indiana's Criminal Benchbook Committee.

Additionally, Magistrate Snyder recently finished a six-year term on the Board of Directors for Drug Free Marion County. During his term, he served for two years as Vice-President and two years as President, and he volunteered many hours to advance the Board's mission. Magistrate Snyder is an active member of the Indianapolis Bar Association and is involved in many of its sections and committees. He was also a distinguished fellow with the Indianapolis Bar Foundation from 2016 to 2021.

We would be pleased to discuss any of these nominees with you in greater detail. Based on their interviews and the Committee's assessment, each nominee has a personality that is well-suited for the bench as well as the legal ability and professional experience to serve with

distinction. Our Committee is confident that each nominee is of high caliber and would be a lasting credit to the Marion Superior Court.

Sincerely,



Loretta H. Rush
*Chief Justice of Indiana
and MCJSC Chairperson*



Robert R. Altice, Jr.
*Chief Judge, Court of Appeals of Indiana
and MCJSC Vice Chairperson*

cc: Joseph R. Heerens, General Counsel, Office of Indiana Governor Eric J. Holcomb