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## BACKGROUND FOR CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE L Derek Renfroe

We have established a questionnaire/interview process in which we will invite candidates to participate as a way to gather both objective and subjective information. This information will be synthesized and used in the selection of the candidates we choose to endorse. As a multi-media outlet with a primary focus on the African-American community, we've established criterion by which we will select the candidates for endorsement. The process of setting the criterion began with a critical analysis of the current state of African Americans in Memphis.

A brief statistical and empirical journey revealed the following:

- According to the 2000 Census, Memphis had the 8<sup>th</sup> largest African-American population percentage-wise at 61.9 percent, representing 402,367 people.
- According to the 1997 Census data, there were 10,931 black-owned businesses in Memphis and of that number only 1,335 had paid employees. Among those 1,335 businesses, average annual revenues were \$357,000 in contrast to average annual sales for white-owned firms (with employees) of \$4,818,000. Among the total number of black-owned firms, average revenues were only \$64,000 per year. More importantly, the total amount of revenues attributed to black-owned business was less than one-tenth of one percent of all revenues generated by all businesses in the Memphis-MSA. (That's \$705,000,000/\$90,391,440,000.)
- According to the U.S Department of Labor unemployment figures for 2009, the percentage for unemployment among African-American men in Tennessee was 20.2 percent compared with 11.1 percent for white men and 17.1 percent for Hispanic men. In some areas of Memphis it was estimated that the rate was 50 percent or more and overall the rate was approximately 30 percent.
- According to [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com), there is nearly a 30 percent poverty rate in the African-American community of Memphis, representing over 132,000 residents. There are neighborhoods where over 90 percent of the residents live at or below the nationally defined poverty rate. According to city-data statistics, there are fewer than 20,000 white residents living at or below the poverty rate and negligible numbers of other represented residents of other races.
- According to statistics released last year by Memphis City Schools, only 66.9 percent of the students are graduating, indicating a 33 percent dropout rate in a district that is over 90 percent African American. According to a 2008 report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, Memphis had the nation's highest gap in graduation rates between black males and white males, standing at 30 percent in 2005/2006.

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- Significant disparities also exist in imprisonment rates, health care, crime and violence and more importantly in the availability of resources and opportunities that would open the door for these circumstances to begin to dynamically or even moderately shift towards more positive trends.

From our point of view candidates must intrinsically understand these dynamics and how they impact the welfare of our entire city. We will endorse candidates- regardless of race or party affiliation- that represent the best vision, that can present solution-oriented plans of action, and exhibit the best ability to execute and deliver on their plans to address the issues and disparities facing the citizens of Memphis.

We understand that the issues that exist in Memphis and Shelby County are broad and complex. We know that each candidate must serve and govern in the interest of all voters. However, also our contention that understanding the severity and significance of the issues confronting black Memphis ó and working to address those issues ó will not only serve to uplift the African-American population of Memphis, but in doing so will improve the quality of life for all Memphians, hopefully allowing us to ultimately and truly be ðOne Memphis.ö

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## CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE

### Vision and Plans

#### *What is your vision for Memphis?*

**Response:** My vision for Memphis is one that provides prosperity for all families along with a safe, clean and healthy living environment.

#### *What is your approach, platform or plan of action for the office that you are seeking? What do you want to ACCOMPLISH while in office and what problems must be addressed in order to achieve those goals and objectives?*

**Response:** As the General Sessions Criminal Court Judge for Division 7, I will approach each matter before me with an impartial view and fairly adjudicate all matters that come before me. I have practiced law for twenty years in this county. I have noticed the volume of this court and the fact that individuals have to make multiple appearances to bring the cases against them to conclusion. My practice and business sense indicate to me that the manner in which the non-violent matters are being handled contributes to the rate of recidivism in this community and creates issues with the defendants job performance and attendance. That is why I will implement and create a night court docket on a weekly basis to deal with those non-violent matters that are brought before me as the sitting Judge in Division 7. This change will decrease the chance that defendants will lose their employment and will lead to a drop in recidivism.

#### *How do you plan to address the challenges and disparities listed in the background section of this questionnaire through the office you desire to hold?*

**Response:** As the General Sessions Criminal Court Judge for Division 7, I face the challenges and disparities that I see head on. Further, if appropriate, I will look for alternative sentencing where appropriate to impact the challenges and disparities noted not only in the African American community but in all communities. Further, I will visit schools, prisons and other places to speak to the youth of our community to address the issues confronting them and to provide insight and awareness as to the impact of incarceration and the role that personal behavior and responsibility play in the development of young men and women in this community. I will be visible, involved and will remain committed to bettering the Memphis and Shelby County community through its citizens.

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## Qualifications and Experience

### *Why are you running for elected office?*

**Response:** Because the status quo has not impacted crime in this community. In fact, more young people are incarcerated annually and the continued election of the career prosecutors and public defenders perpetuate the increased incarceration as they are unwilling to try differing approaches to crime prevention. I bring new ideas and a differing viewpoint to the bench. I will hold the prosecutors accountable as well as the defendant's lawyers. The cost of not participating is too high not to run as lives are impacted faster by the Judges in General Sessions Criminal Court than they are by any other elected official.

### *What makes you qualified for holding the office you are seeking? What previous experience lends itself to success in the office?*

**Response:** I have distinguished myself in the practice of law for the last twenty years. I have maintained a practice that has prepared me for the bench. I clerked for the Honorable Chief Judge Odell Horton, Sr. who has guided my career and served as a role model for judicial effectiveness. I have been appointed Special Judge in the General Sessions Court; been appointed Chairman of the Memphis Alcohol Commission; and have been appointed and served for several years as a hearing officer for the Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility which is another quasi-judicial function.

During my tenure as a Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility hearing officer I have authored opinions for adoption by the Tennessee Supreme Court that have directly determined the termination and suspension of a lawyer's ability to practice law in Tennessee. These experiences parallel the issues and responsibilities of a Judge that would preside in Division 7 of the Shelby County General Sessions Criminal Court.

### *Who has endorsed or expressed public support for your candidacy?*

**Response:** Many members of the Alpha Delta Lambda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. as well as several practicing Attorneys, including but not limited to Odell Horton Jr., Archie Sanders III and Paul Robinson, Jr. have endorsed and expressed public support for my candidacy.

## Ability to Implement Initiatives

*A clear vision and a plan for the future are important, but it means nothing if a candidate does not have the ability to get anything accomplished.*

*How would you address the issues identified as most critical for the city/county from the seat you are seeking?*

**Response:** It is my belief that lives are changed quicker by a sitting judge than by the Mayor or the President and that is why it is imperative that we have Judges who are experienced not only the law but in life. Memphis and Shelby County is at a critical stage as its citizens are the vice grip of the recession and the destabilizing effects of racial divisions. This serves as a backdrop for the key issue that impacts the direction of this community, higher education and the preparation of the Memphis and Shelby County student to participate in the higher education paradigm.

As sitting Judge it is my obligation to give back to the community by continuing my community service as a volunteer with young boys in downtown area. This service gives hands on contact with young boys from the ages of 6 to 18 that are given the opportunity to work and learn from volunteers and each other. This I submit will create a culture and work ethics in those boys that will help them become assets to our community.

As a Judge I must apply the law of Tennessee cases that come before me. I will swiftly and fairly deal with all matters that come before me. This I submit will keep our citizens safe and will protect families. Finally, I will work a full day every day and will implement a night court so that those charged with non violent offenses that are non violent have the opportunity to continue to work their jobs and not miss days of work on their jobs.

*What opportunities do you see in working with other elected officials and or with other governmental bodies in the metro area and how do you define your role in government and the overall role of government?*

**Response:** As a member of the Judiciary I would work with the Clerk of Court in setting up an alternative to daytime court. Many lives are impacted by sitting judges and it is imperative that Judges apply the law to the facts presented. I would make myself available as allowed by the Canons of the Judiciary to discuss issues with legislators but at all times I would maintain my impartiality.

The bedrock of our judicial system is its independence. However, the Judgeship provides the opportunity to impact Memphis and Shelby County by deterring crime, the rehabilitation of defendants. I will work with other branches of government when appropriate to better the lives of Memphians and Shelby county residents.



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***How would you go about obtaining consensus or support to accomplish goals or in the case of a judgeship or similar position how do you go about making your rulings/decisions?***

***Response:*** Judges are bound to apply the law to the facts presented to them during a trial or hearing that they are presiding over. Clearly I would require all parties to meet their burdens of proof and I would listen to all parties before rendering judgment. Further, I would rule on matters with dispatch. Defendants and others need to have a right to a speedy decision on their cases. I will rule on each case with considered fairness without regard to social position or standing in the community. Finally, I believe in the U.S. and Tennessee Constitutions and each decision would be a studied decision always fairly and independently applying the law.

***Would you demonstrate the integrity and fortitude to stand on principle to accomplish an important objective despite opposition or lack of popularity for an idea? Give an example. Provide past examples of experiences you had where that was the case?***

***Response:*** As I stated herein, Judges are bound to apply the law to the facts presented to them during a trial or hearing that they are presiding over. During my years of practice I have terminated clients who have suborned perjury and/or promoted activity that would have violated the law. This was unpopular and caused my office to lose money but I stood on principle irrespective of money.