

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COMMISSION
ON JUDICIAL DISABILITIES AND TENURE**

515 FIFTH STREET, N.W., BUILDING A, ROOM 246
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001
(202) 727-1363

February 5, 2013

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: Evaluation of the Honorable Melvin R. Wright

Dear Mr. President:

The fifteen-year term of the Honorable Melvin R. Wright, an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, expires on April 6, 2013. He is seeking reappointment to another term.

Pursuant to Section 433 (c) of the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act, 87 Stat. 744, as amended by the District of Columbia Judicial Efficiency and Improvement Act of 1986, P.L. 99-573, 100 Stat. 3228, the District of Columbia Commission on Judicial Disabilities and Tenure (“the Commission”) hereby submits this evaluation of Judge Wright’s performance during his present term of office and his fitness for reappointment. Section 433 (c) provides:

Not less than six months prior to the expiration of his term of office, any judge of the District of Columbia courts may file with the Tenure Commission a declaration of candidacy for reappointment. If a declaration is not filed by any judge, a vacancy shall result from the expiration of his term of office and shall be filled by appointment as provided in subsections (a) and (b). If a declaration is so

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filed, the Tenure Commission shall, not less than sixty days prior to the expiration of the declaring candidate's term of office, prepare and submit to the President a written evaluation of the declaring candidate's performance during his present term of office and his fitness for reappointment to another term. If the Tenure Commission determines the declaring candidate to be well qualified for reappointment to another term, then the term of such declaring candidate shall be automatically extended for another full term, subject to mandatory retirement, suspension, or removal. If the Tenure Commission determines the declaring candidate to be qualified for reappointment to another term, then the President shall nominate such a candidate, in which case the President shall submit to the Senate for advice and consent the renomination of the declaring candidate as judge. If the President determines not to so nominate such declaring candidate, he shall nominate another candidate for such position only in accordance with the provisions of subsections (a) and (b). If the Tenure Commission determines the declaring candidate to be unqualified for reappointment to another term, then the President shall not submit to the Senate for advice and consent the renomination of the declaring candidate as judge and such judge shall not be eligible for reappointment or appointment as a judge of a District of Columbia court.

The Commission reserves the term "well qualified" for those judges whose work product, legal scholarship, dedication, efficiency, and demeanor are exceptional on the bench, and the candidate's performance consistently reflects credit on the judicial system. The Commission will determine a judge is "qualified" if he or she satisfactorily performs his or her assigned duties or whose strong positive attributes are materially offset, but not overborne, by negative traits. A finding of "unqualified" means the Commission has found the judge to be unfit for judicial service.

Judge Wright filed his timely declaration of candidacy for reappointment with the Commission on September 26, 2012. In evaluating Judge Wright's qualifications for reappointment and his contributions to the Court and the community, the Commission has carefully reviewed his record as a sitting judge. Judge Wright's submission in support of his

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candidacy included a comprehensive statement of his judicial and professional activities during the past fifteen years. The statement provided a thorough discussion of Judge Wright's significant contributions to the Civil Division first as the Deputy Presiding Judge and now as Presiding Judge, his tremendous efforts in improving Court services to the public, and his important work on Court and Bar Committees. In addition, the statement revealed Judge Wright's philosophy with respect to his judicial responsibilities, in which he wrote, "In each case that I have handled, I have strived to render decisions that were fair and based on the law. Whatever their stations in life, or the merits of their cases, I have treated litigants with respect."

Judge Wright's submission also included several opinions of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals affirming the Judge's decisions in a variety of criminal and civil cases. A review of his appellate record indicates that the Judge's rulings are seldom reversed. Of the 290 decisions that were appealed to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, over 90% have been affirmed or dismissed by that Court.

The Commission examined Judge Wright's monthly time reports and annual financial statements and its complaint file concerning the Judge, and found nothing in its files that would adversely affect his reappointment. The Commission also reviewed a detailed statement from Judge Wright's physician attesting to his excellent health and the absence of any medical reason why he cannot continue to perform his judicial duties.

On January 9, 2013, the Commission met with Judge Wright and discussed with him the material and information it had received during the course of its evaluation. The Commission also met with Chief Judge Lee Satterfield that day and he provided additional information

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concerning Judge Wright's qualifications, lasting contributions, and his invaluable service to the Superior Court.

The Commission reviewed communications from attorneys and judges concerning Judge Wright's qualifications, and Court personnel and attorneys familiar with aspects of his record and service were interviewed. Virtually all of the comments the Commission received concerning Judge Wright were laudatory. He was described as, "a caring, civil, thoughtful, steady, and knowledgeable Judge", who is "blessed with common sense, shows good judgment in trying situations, and is respected by bench and bar." Judge Wright was also commended for his leadership of the Civil Division in his capacity as Presiding Judge, in particular for his ability to "anticipate problems and develop effective solutions", and for his skill at "building consensus".

Judge Wright was appointed to the bench in 1998, by President William Jefferson Clinton. He has served in all Divisions of the Superior Court, except the Probate and Tax Division, in a variety of assignments. The highlights of Judge Wright's distinguished judicial career include his assignment in the Superior Court Drug Intervention Program (Drug Court), where he monitored and conducted reviews of persons who tested positive for drug use and arranged treatment and counsel for those individuals. Judge Wright found the experience so rewarding he volunteered to serve for a second year in Drug Court, which became the normal rotation for judges assigned to that calendar. As Presiding Judge of Drug Court, Judge Wright became very concerned about the conditions at the D.C. Jail. As a result, the Judge embarked on

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a course of action requiring Jail officials and other related parties to meet with him monthly and discuss the problems encountered by Drug Court detainees who must serve jail sentences. Due to Judge Wright's initiative and determination, the Jail had to modernize its record keeping and ensure that detainees did not serve more than their required jail time. In addition, a more productive working relationship has evolved between the Court and the Jail because of Judge Wright's intervention.

In 2003, Judge Wright assumed responsibility for a Civil Division trial calendar and supervised an average of 350 cases per year for four years. Judge Wright, like all judges assigned to a civil calendar, was responsible for setting discovery schedules, handling pre-trial and settlement conferences, and trying cases that ranged from routine automobile accidents to complicated medical malpractice suits. He rotated through Landlord and Tenant Court, and Small Claims Courts in addition to handling his individual trial calendar.

Judge Wright was appointed Deputy Presiding Judge of the Civil Division in 2008, and since May 5, 2011, has served as Presiding Judge of that Division. It is his work in these two assignments that has generated the most praise for Judge Wright. While serving as Deputy Presiding Judge, Chief Judge Lee Satterfield directed Judge Wright to create a forum where tenants would be able to file suit in order to require landlords to repair properties in violation of the D.C. Housing Code, and to have an expedited hearing without hiring a lawyer. Judge Wright deserves much praise for his outstanding leadership in the establishment of the Court's Housing Conditions Calendar. This Calendar is particularly effective in cases where tenants are without basic necessities such as heat, water, electricity, and gas. Thanks in large part to Judge Wright's

efforts, the Calendar, which has been in existence approximately 2½ years, has a 75% rate of completion of repairs within 90 days or less.

The Presiding Judge of the Civil Division acts as the first level of appeal for any decision made by Magistrate Judges. The D.C. Superior Court Rules require that any decision made in Small Claims, on the Collections Calendar, or in the Tax Division must be presented to the Presiding Judge before it can proceed to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. When Judge Wright became Presiding Judge, there were approximately 150 cases pending review in the Small Claims Branch. Understanding that the prevailing practice of judges writing lengthy opinions in these cases substantially prolonged the time in which decisions were rendered, Judge Wright devised a simple and thoughtful solution. He decided the more efficient procedure would be to set the matter for a hearing, talk to the parties involved, who often are pro se litigants, and decide the matter on the record in court. This new procedure has removed the backlog and a review of any case in Small Claims can now be heard in 2-3 weeks. Judge Wright wisely realized that sometimes the best solutions are the simplest ones, when he wrote, “I find that in most cases taking the time to explain why the court did not find in someone’s favor gives the appellant some acceptance of the decision.”

The Presiding and Deputy Presiding Judges of the Civil Division are responsible for the daily operation of the Division. This includes managing fourteen separate calendars with each judge carrying approximately 300 cases, training the fifteen Associate Judges assigned to the Division, and supervising and training two assigned Magistrate Judges. Though Judge Wright as

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Presiding Judge does not carry the same caseload as the judges assigned to the Division, he has other significant Court matters that he manages including a Second Landlord and Tenant Calendar and a Second Tax Calendar, as well as monitoring of the Judge In Chambers branch, even though it is not part of the Civil Division.

Judge Wright's contributions to the Superior Court also extend to the many hours he has devoted to service on Court Committees. He Chaired the Jury Committee, and has served on the Performance Standard Committee, the Training Committee, and the Superior Court Liaison Committee, which meets periodically with this Commission. Judge Wright has been very active in Bar Committees as well, namely the Access to Justice Committee, the Pro Bono Committee, the Youth Law Fair Committee, and the Committee on the Courts, Lawyers, and the Administration of Justice. During his term of office, in addition to his judicial duties, Judge Wright has found time to judge mock trials and appellate arguments, met with community groups to discuss the work of the Court, and participated in programs designed to inspire the young people in our community.

It appears to the Commission that Judge Wright is most deserving of reappointment. The examples cited in this report of Judge Wright's dedication, industry and innovation are illustrative of his entire court service. He has worked hard, provided leadership to the Court, respected and had compassion for those who appeared before him, and gave generously of his time and energy to an institution he reveres.

For the foregoing reasons, the Commission finds that Judge Wright's distinguished judicial service merits his automatic reappointment to the bench. The Commission is unanimous

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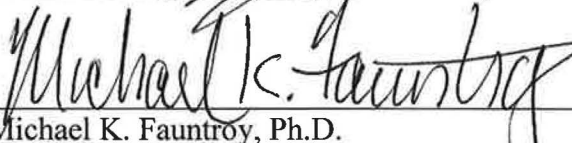
in finding Judge Melvin R. Wright well qualified for reappointment and his term shall be automatically extended for a full term of fifteen years from April 7, 2013.


Respectfully submitted,

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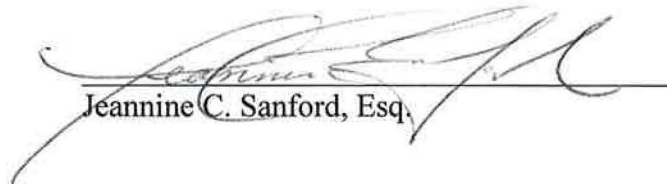

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