



Indiana Supreme Court

Chambers of Justice Derek R. Molter • 317-232-6909 • courts.in.gov

November 1, 2024

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 Monday, October 28, 2024, and Tuesday, October 29, 2024, and selected six nominees for two vacancies on the Marion Superior Court due to the retirements of the Honorable John Hanley and the Honorable Mark Stoner, effective December 31, 2024. 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.

For the first vacancy, the committee nominates the following three candidates:

- **Judge Kimberly J. Bacon**
- **Magistrate Tara Y. Melton**
- **Magistrate Terrance T. Tharpe**

For the second vacancy, the committee nominates the following three candidates:

- **Magistrate Pauline A. Beeson**
- **Magistrate Katharine Melnick Sahlein**
- **Magistrate James K. Snyder**

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.

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

Judge Kimberly J. Bacon

Born in Delaware and raised in Marion County, Indiana, Kimberly J. Bacon received a bachelor's degree in marketing from Southern University A&M in Louisiana and continued at their School of Law for her Juris Doctorate degree. After graduating, Judge Bacon spent more than eight years in the corporate world as a human resources professional before joining the Indiana bar.

Judge Bacon was in a solo private practice from 1999 through 2014. During that time, she litigated equal employment opportunity cases, was an administrative law judge, and served as a conflict public defender, managing a caseload in excess of 90 cases. While in private practice, she litigated about 30 jury trials, numerous bench trials as a civil attorney, and over 100 bench trials as a criminal attorney and public defender.

In January 2015, Judge Bacon was elected to serve as the Lawrence Township Small Claims Court judge. She has presided over more than 300 bench trials and rules on more than 11,000 cases each year. Her trial docket consists of matters involving landlord-tenant disputes, contracts, tort claims, and debt collection matters of \$10,000 or less.

Since being elected to the bench, Judge Bacon has implemented a self-help forms center, an interactive website, the ability for online payments, and a small claims litigant handbook, which is available in the office and online in both English and Spanish.

Notably, Judge Bacon has received multiple grants for her work with the sustainable eviction-diversion program. In 2020–2021, she was awarded a \$165,000 Court Reform grant from the Indiana Supreme Court for an eviction-diversion pilot to both rethink the eviction process and collaborate to get rental assistance distributed. In 2022, the National Center for State Courts awarded her \$460,000 (over four years)—one of only ten jurisdictions across the country—to continue eviction-diversion work. With that funding, Judge Bacon has provided court customers with navigators and facilitators, installed a self-represented kiosk, and launched a tenant-advocate program with the city, which has reduced evictions. Because of this success, Judge Bacon was awarded two additional grants (\$2.3 million from the Indiana Bar Foundation and \$205,000 from Nina Pulliam Foundation) to expand the eviction-diversion program in other township small claims courts. A fellow judge lauded her “commitment to judicial independence” and her demonstration of leadership “by her willingness to embrace innovation.”

Outside of her duties on the bench, Judge Bacon has been appointed to the Judicial Conference Education Committee, and in 2023, she graduated from the Indiana Judicial College and the Indiana Graduate Program for Judges. She has also developed relationships and partnerships with Pew Research, Marion County’s Health Department, Lawrence Townships Schools, and the Heartland Pro Bono Council. In addition, Judge

Bacon is active with the Indiana State Bar Association, the Marion County Bar, and her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha.

Magistrate Tara Y. Melton

Tara Y. Melton, originally from Pensacola, Florida, has been a dedicated member of the Marion Superior Court's Family Division since 2021. She earned an Associate of Arts in General Studies from Pensacola Junior College in 1988, graduating cum laude. She then completed her Bachelor of Science in Agri-Business with a minor in Economics at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in 1991, also graduating cum laude. In 1994, she obtained her Juris Doctorate from Florida State University College of Law, where she actively participated in the Student Bar Association, the Black Law Student Association, and the Juvenile Law Clinic.

Magistrate Melton is licensed to practice in Indiana (2008), Florida (1995), and Maryland (1999). Before relocating to Indianapolis in 2007, she worked for a legal aid organization, at a law firm, and within various government agencies, including the Department of Children & Families in Panama City.

In 2007, Magistrate Melton joined Lee Cossell & Feagley in Indianapolis as a staff attorney, a position she held until 2011. During her time there, she passionately supported the not-for-profit Fathers and Families Center from 2008 to 2016, advocating for nonresident fathers in child welfare courts through monthly legal workshops designed to empower them with a better understanding of the legal process. Her commitment to underprivileged children has become a central passion in her life as she has strived to understand their challenges and improve their circumstances.

From 2011 to 2017, she worked at the Marion County Public Defender Agency. She then took on a pivotal position at Child Advocates in Indianapolis, first as a permanency facilitator and mediator and then as the Director of Mediation. Magistrate Melton has also served as a Judge Pro Tempore in the small claims courts of both Center Township and Lawrence Township.

In her current role as a magistrate in the Family Division, she oversees weekly CHINS and juvenile delinquency dockets, managing fact-finding trials, TPR trials, and various motion hearings. Her responsibilities also encompass hearings related to dissolution, paternity, adoption, guardianship, and protective orders.

Outside the courtroom, 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 often shares her expertise as a speaker and panelist

on legal issues and provides training at continuing legal education seminars. She served on the Judicial Conference of Indiana’s Ethics and Professionalism Committee. Another judge noted that Magistrate Melton is “dedicated to fostering trust in the judiciary by her active involvement in the profession and the community that she serves.”

Magistrate Melton is committed to mentoring youth and has served on the boards of various community-oriented non-profits. She is also an active member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Magistrate Terrance T. Tharpe

Terrance T. Tharpe, born and raised in Indianapolis, has been serving as a magistrate on the Marion Superior Court since December 2022. He completed his Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at Wabash College in 2000, earning the distinction of President’s Scholar. He then obtained his Juris Doctorate from Indiana University Maurer School of Law in 2003, where he was honored as an ICLEO Fellow and served as the Managing Editor for the Federal Communications Law Journal.

After graduating, Magistrate Tharpe first practiced as a solo attorney before joining the Marion County Prosecutor’s Office in 2004 as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney. During his time there, he rose through the ranks to become the Chief Felony Firearms Prosecutor and Assistant Supervisor of the felony narcotics unit.

From January 2013 to January 2016, Magistrate Tharpe worked as a law clerk for Judge Rudolph R. Pyle III at the Court of Appeals of Indiana, where he specialized in legal research and writing for both criminal and civil appeals. He then transitioned to GEICO as a staff attorney from January 2016 to December 2018, defending personal injury and property damage lawsuits statewide. Magistrate Tharpe returned to the Prosecutor’s Office in December 2018 as Chief Counsel, where he oversaw civil litigation, budgeting, and human resources. He was subsequently promoted to Chief Trial Deputy, taking charge of criminal operations and technology initiatives.

Magistrate Tharpe has significant trial experience, having served as first or second chair in 31 criminal jury trials and having participated in over 100 bench trials. In his role as magistrate, he focuses on initial hearings, bond settings, and search-warrant requests in the Initial Hearing Court, while also stepping in for other judges as needed. A colleague has described him as “well-reasoned and thoughtful when addressing issues as they arise . . . always respectful and considerate. . . . [and possessing] the ability to see both sides of a problem.”

Magistrate Tharpe's leadership philosophy emphasizes collaboration and leading by example, valuing the perspectives of others, and striving to create an inclusive environment

where diverse viewpoints are considered. This approach has shaped his work in both the courtroom and community. On top of his judicial responsibilities, he is actively involved in the legal community as a Lifetime Member and former President of the Marion County Bar Association and by sitting on the board of directors of the Indianapolis Bar Foundation. He also recently became a member of the Judicial Council of the National Bar Association. Additionally, since 2014, he has led Project MR., which empowers young men, earning recognition for his impactful contributions. Magistrate Tharpe is also a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity and participates in community service initiatives aimed at enhancing education and civic engagement.

Magistrate Pauline A. Beeson

Born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, Pauline “Polly” A. Beeson has spent the last nine 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. Magistrate Beeson then earned her Juris Doctorate from Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law in 2008. Upon graduation, she worked as a deputy public defender where she managed 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 and later formed Russell & Weitzman, practicing criminal defense, juvenile law, and family law. During this time, Magistrate Beeson also worked part-time as a public defender on cases involving CHINS, TPR, and juvenile delinquency.

Magistrate Beeson left private practice in 2015 to serve as the Director of the Arrestee Processing Center for the Marion Superior Court. In 2017, she shifted to 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. In 2021, Magistrate Beeson became the term manager to support 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 that ultimately led to developing the new Family Division.

In February 2022, Magistrate Beeson was appointed as a 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. Magistrate Beeson was appointed in July 2022 to serve on the Judicial Conference of Indiana’s Child Welfare Committee. And in July 2023, she was selected to participate in a judicial wellness program, The Inner Work of Judging, which is funded by

the Indiana Supreme Court. A public official observed that “even when faced with difficult circumstances and personalities, she has always been professional and courteous, going above and beyond to resolve conflict quickly and resolutely.”

Magistrate Beeson was chosen to participate in the Graduate Judges Program, and she regularly presents continuing legal education seminars, training attorneys and judges on topics such as e-filing, rules on access to court records, and remote hearings. She is also an active member of the Indiana Judges Association (including being appointed to its board of managers), the Indiana State Bar Association, the Indianapolis Bar Association, and was recently elected to the Executive Committee for the Indianapolis Bar Association’s Women in Law Division.

Magistrate Katharine Melnick Sahlein

Born in New Haven, Connecticut, Katharine Melnick Sahlein has served as a magistrate for the Marion County Superior Court since 2023. Magistrate Melnick Sahlein earned a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Columbia University in 2003 before earning her Juris Doctorate from St. John’s University School of Law in 2007, where she was a recipient of the St. Thomas More Scholarship. She graduated cum laude and was an Associate Editor for the St. John’s Journal of Legal Commentary.

After graduating, she began as a litigation associate for a New York law firm where she persuaded her partners to allow her to pursue substantial pro bono opportunities. She then took a role as an assistant district attorney for the New York County District Attorney’s Office, handling matters from charging all the way through resolution. In 2014, she moved to Marion County, working as a deputy prosecutor in the Marion County Prosecutor’s Office Special Victims Unit. In 2018, she was promoted to supervisor of the unit, a role she maintained until 2023. During that time, she conducted over 100 jury trials and prided herself on creating a comfortable and collaborative environment, focusing on mentoring young prosecutors and lawyers on the benefits of mutual trust and respect. She also served as the chair for the Sexual Assault Response Team and the Child Fatality Review Team, helping to implement a multi-disciplinary approach to improve community-based responses to specific crimes.

In 2023, Magistrate Melnick Sahlein was hired as the magistrate for Courts 6 and 11, where she presides over evictions, protection orders, damages, medical malpractice, and other civil matters. She has also presided over criminal and family matters by volunteering to assist her judicial colleagues. And she has made efforts to help litigants feel more comfortable and safer by both staggering the arrival times for petitioners and respondents and opening her court early on protection order hearing dates to ensure the parties do not have to wait outside her courtroom.

Off the bench, Magistrate Melnick Sahlein is a member of the Judicial Protection Order Committee, providing updates to Indiana’s Protection Order Deskbook and working with the Office of Court Technology on the protection-order registry. Another judge declared that her “work ethic, administrative capabilities and intellect are an asset to our judicial system and would serve her well on the bench.”

In the community, Magistrate Melnick Sahlein served on the board of directors of Legacy House, a non-profit organization that offered counseling to victims of violent crimes. And she was named the 2023 Champion of the Year for her volunteer work with Best Buddies. She is also a member of the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation and the Temple Sisterhood, and she volunteers at least once a week, currently working with Wheeler Mission and Gleaners Food Bank as well as organizing group service activities for the Marion County magistrates.

Magistrate James K. Snyder

Born in New Castle, Indiana, 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. Following law school, he became a law clerk and later a certified legal intern at the Marion County Prosecutor’s Office.

After passing the bar exam, Magistrate Snyder served as a deputy prosecutor with the Prosecutor’s Office until April 2007 before 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, he 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 where he worked the overnight shift at the Arrestee Processing Center. In May 2016, he moved to Criminal Court 20, which was Indiana’s highest volume criminal court as a Major Felony Gun and Drug Court.

In January 2020, he became a magistrate and remained in the Major Felony Division, presently serving in Courts 28 and 32. Additionally, since April 2023, he has served in the Initial Hearing Court, starting early in the morning to review time-sensitive search warrants and probable cause findings. Magistrate Snyder has tried 119 criminal jury trials, including 85 as a judicial officer and 34 as a defense attorney.

Off the bench, 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 member of the Indiana Judges Association's Criminal Instructions Committee, and he currently serves on the Judicial Conference of Indiana's Criminal Benchbook Committee.

In the community, Magistrate Snyder recently finished a six-year term on the board of directors for Drug Free Marion County—serving two years as Vice-President and two years as President—and has volunteered many hours to advance the board's mission. Magistrate Snyder is an active member of the Indianapolis Bar Association, serving on the board of directors, and was a distinguished fellow with the Indianapolis Bar Foundation from 2016 to 2021. A fellow judicial officer described him as an individual who "works hard to ensure a fair process for all involved—the defendants, the victims, the witnesses, and the families."

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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,



Derek R. Molter
*Justice of the Supreme Court of Indiana
and MCJSC Chairperson*



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