

Christianna Dougherty-Cunningham, Esq.
2506 Reagan Ave.
Virginia Beach, VA 23454

November 25, 2022

Virginia Beach Bar Association
Attn: Edward Booth, President
2425 Nimmo Parkway, Building 10B
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456

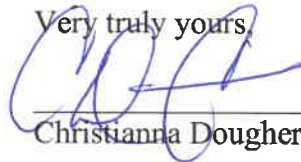
Re: Nomination of Christianna Dougherty-Cunningham for Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Judge

Dear Mr. Booth,

It is with great respect that I submit my nomination packet as a candidate for the Virginia Beach Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Bench- should a vacancy on that bench become available. I am available to answer any questions or provide any additional information or resources as may be requested by the Board or the Delegation.

Thanking you, I remain,

Very truly yours,



Christianna Dougherty-Cunningham, Esq.

CDC;pjd
cc. Kathy Stull, VBBA Executive Director

Office of the City Attorney
Municipal Center, Building 1
2401 Courthouse Drive
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

November 23, 2022

Virginia Beach Bar Association
Attn: Edward Booth, President
2425 Nimmo Parkway, Building 10B
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456

Re: Nomination of Christianna Dougherty-Cunningham for Juvenile and Domestic Relations
Court Judge

Dear Mr. Booth,

It is my honor to nominate Christianna Dougherty-Cunningham as a candidate for a vacancy on the Virginia Beach Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Bench should one become available during the coming session. Ms. Cunningham has been an attorney in the City Attorney's Office since March 2004, coming to the office after almost five years of private practice. Her work with the office has demonstrated that she is a dedicated and driven individual who is trustworthy, steadfast, and a true team-player. In her eighteen years with our office, she has handled almost every type of municipal litigation, often taking on new subject matters with little assistance. She has been a trusted member of our litigation team, starting off her career with the City handling civil litigation assignments and eminent domain matters. She quickly was handling both bench and jury trials. In approximately 2008, our office's social services department found itself unexpectedly without counsel and Ms. Cunningham and two of her colleagues stepped in to assist. Although up to that point, her experience with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court had been limited to custody and visitation cases in private practice, Ms. Cunningham spent hours learning child welfare law and quickly became more than proficient such that she assisted in establishing new office procedures for making the child dependency dockets run more efficiently.

Ms. Cunningham has always been one of those individuals willing to step in and help wherever and whenever anyone needs assistance. She is always available for her clients and colleagues to listen and work through problems to find the right outcome. Of late, she has been integral part in trying to mitigate challenges faced by Virginia Beach citizens who must navigate the mental health system in Virginia. She has also been a prominent voice at the table in the implementation of the statewide Virginia Department of Social Services Performance Improvement Program that came as a result of the Federal Child and Family Services Review and the 2017 Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's study into child welfare practices across the state.

While carrying a full docket and managing multiple committee assignments with various state and local workgroups focusing on juvenile law, child welfare, and mental health issues, Ms. Cunningham devotes most of her personal time to activities that further the legal profession. She has been a grader for the Virginia State Bar for over fifteen years and has served on the Virginia Beach Bar Association Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Committee for over ten years, acting as Committee Chair since 2017. Her tireless work with the Virginia Beach Bar Association and development of annual day-long continuing legal education seminars that involve the bar and bench, and typically fulfill most of the

required credits for both the Guardian *ad Litem* Certification and the Indigent Defense Commission, recently earned her the 2021 Virginia Beach Bar Association Service Award. Ms. Cunningham has also been an active member of the James Kent American Inn of Court and served as its president from 2019-2020. While working with the Inn, she has mentored numerous law students and newly licensed lawyers in an effort to ensure the proliferation of civility and ethics within the profession. Ms. Cunningham also routinely serves as a moot court and mock trial judge for both the College of William & Mary and Regent University and has published for the latter.

The subject matter over which the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court presides is broad, and the parties that come before the Court often include the most vulnerable individuals in our community. The cases often involve extremely sensitive facts and on occasion, simultaneous civil and criminal matters arising from the same events are active on the docket, posing unique constitutional and statutory issues for the Court to properly navigate. It is these unique cases where Ms. Cunningham excels; she does not shy from complexity and brings a calm yet probing perspective to ascertain the correct answer within the boundaries of the law. She routinely lends her expertise to various local and statewide workgroups focusing on child welfare, juvenile detention alternatives, mental health, and racial and ethnic disparity issues, and has devoted a significant period of time working with the Virginia Department of Social Services and the Court Improvement Program through the Office of the Executive Secretary in the statewide implementation of the federally required Performance Improvement Plan.

Ms. Cunningham also brings a perspective to the local bench shared by many of the citizens who come before our Virginia Beach Courts, namely she is not a native Virginian. Born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, Ms. Cunningham attended Arizona State University, graduating in 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts in Broadcasting. She worked in Phoenix radio for a year before returning home to St. Louis for law school. After graduating from St. Louis University School of Law in 1999, she relocated to Virginia Beach with her then soon to be husband, Mark "McKay" Cunningham, who had taken a job with a local radio station. The Cunninghams now consider Virginia Beach their hometown and have been active in the community for the past 23 years.

Ms. Cunningham has dedicated the majority of her career to public service. That said, she did start out her career with the Norfolk based firm of Tavss Fletcher, and thus she has an appreciation for the private bar. Ms. Cunningham has no disciplinary history, and it is clear from her demonstrated work ethic and determined involvement in related activities that her work is not merely a job, it is a passion. Ms. Cunningham will undoubtedly bring the same passion to the Virginia Beach Juvenile and Domestic Relations Bench. This passion will certainly be a benefit to those families, children, and persons coming before the Court, often at the worst times in their life, when they need to be heard, and when they need to access justice in an efficient, yet thorough and patient manner.

Again, I am honored to nominate Ms. Cunningham as I believe she would make an excellent member of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court bench and I request your thoughtful consideration of her candidacy should one become available during this term.

Very truly yours,



Mark D. Stiles
City Attorney

11.25.2022

It is my honor to second the nomination of Christianna Dougherty-Cunningham as a candidate for the Virginia Beach Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Bench. I have read and agree with the nomination of Mr. Stiles.

Sharon Brody, Esq.



Christianna Dougherty-Cunningham, Esq.

Since 2004, Ms. Cunningham has served as a Virginia Beach Associate City Attorney. Presently, she is assigned to the human services litigation section handling adult and child welfare matters, adult corrections, and protected information, but also has handled civil defense and eminent domain. Prior to joining the City, she was with Tavss Fletcher in Norfolk, VA. She graduated from Arizona State University *cum laude* with a BA in Broadcasting in 1995 and received her JD *cum laude* from St. Louis University in 1999. She is the chair of the Virginia Beach Bar Association JDR Committee, is the past president and longstanding member of the James Kent American Inn of Court, a member of the VB Court Improvement Team/Juvenile Detention Alternatives Committee, the VB Racial and Ethnic Disparities Workgroup, the Capstone Initiative, the VDSS Performance Improvement Plan, the ICWA Compliance Workgroup, and the Marcus Alert Implementation Team. She is a grader for the Virginia Bar Exam and a judge for mock trial tournaments for the College of William and Mary and Regent University. In October of 2021, Ms. Cunningham received the VBBA Bar Service Award.

Professional Experience:

March 2004 – Present

Associate City Attorney, City of Virginia Beach

- Currently assigned to the human services section handling child welfare/child dependency cases involving abuse and neglect, juvenile involuntary commitment, adult protective services, guardian and conservatorships, mental & behavioral health related matters, developmental services, adult corrections and re-entry involving matters of defendants found not guilty by reason of insanity and those found unrestorable and incompetent to stand trial, and human services protected information/FOIA
- Prior assignments included litigation related matters, 42 USC §1983 defense, eminent domain and other real estate related litigation, civil tort defense, collections, workers compensation defense, unemployment claims, personnel board matters, civil process, Section 8 and voucher program matters, and local taxation claims
- First chair on bench and jury trials

October 1999-March 2004 **Associate Attorney, Tavss, Fletcher, Maiden, & King**

- Assisted with plaintiff's personal injury and medical malpractice suits, eminent domain litigation, and felony criminal defense
- First chair with primary responsibility on guardianship and conservatorship actions, misdemeanor criminal and traffic defense, divorce, and custody and visitation matters
- Primary responsibility over management of large collections docket
- Transactional practice involving commercial and residential real estate contract negotiation and settlement for real property purchases and commercial leasing
- Primary responsibility over landlord/tenant unlawful detainer docket

Education & Licensure:

1999 Licensure ~ Virginia State Bar

1999 Saint Louis University School of Law, JD *cum laude*

1995 Arizona State University, B.A. Broadcasting, *cum laude*

Professional Associations, Committees, and Workgroups:

2004-Present Virginia Local Government Association

- Frequent CLE Presenter on Human Services Issues

2005-Present James Kent American Inn of Court

- 2009-Present ~ Executive Committee Member
- 2015-2017 ~ Secretary
- 2019- 2020 ~ President

2007- Present VBJDR Court Improvement Committee/ Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative Committee

2015- Present Virginia Beach Bar Association JDR Committee

- 2015 to Present ~ Annual CLE Coordinator
- 2017 to Present ~ Committee Chair

2016-2017 Virginia Beach Capstone Initiative to Mitigate Cross-Over Youth

2017- Present VBJDR Racial and Ethnic Disparities Workgroup

2019- Present VDSS Statewide Performance Improvement Program/Court Community Workgroup

2021- Present VDSS Statewide Indian Child Welfare Compliance Workgroup

2021- Present VB Marcus Alert Stakeholders Group

Awards: October 2021~ Virginia Beach Bar Association Bar Service Award

Professional Education and Activities

- 2004 - Present Grader ~ Virginia State Bar Exam

- 2006 Nat'l Institute for Trial Advocacy ~ Advanced Trial Skills ~ Georgetown University

- 2010 - Present Moot Court and Mock Trial Judge ~ College of William & Mary and Regent University

Publications:

“Family Preservation and Prevention, Engagement, and Access to Services in Virginia,” Regent University Law Review, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2018.