

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL
FIRST DISTRICT, STATE OF FLORIDA

RON DESANTIS, in his official capacity
as Governor of the State of Florida, et al.,

Appellants,

Consolidated DCA Case Nos.
1D20-2470 and 1D20-2472
L.T. Case No.: 2020-CA-001450

vs.

FLORIDA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION,
et al.,

Appellees,

and

MONIQUE BELLEFLEUR, et al.,

Appellees.

MOTION FOR DISQUALIFICATION

Appellees/Plaintiffs, Florida Education Association, Stefanie Beth Miller, Ladara Royal, Mindy Festge, Victoria Dublino-Henjes, Andres Henjes, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Inc., NAACP Florida State Conference, and Monique Bellefleur, et al. (collectively, “Appellees”) most respectfully move to disqualify the Honorable Lori Rowe and Honorable Timothy Osterhaus in this case, if they have not already recused themselves, because of events that occurred yesterday, and as grounds, state:

1. Appellees have the utmost respect for Judge Rowe and Judge Osterhaus. Circumstances have arisen, however, under which disqualification is called for. This motion is made with respect to any assigned panel matters, and potentially in any en banc proceedings.

2. Based on both judges' respective merit, both were nominated by the Supreme Court Judicial Nominating Commission to Governor DeSantis as nominees for appointment to the Supreme Court of Florida on January 23, 2020.

3. From that list, Governor DeSantis selected Circuit Judge Renatha Francis for appointment as Justice, to join the Court at such time as she met the minimum ten-year experience requirement, which has not yet occurred.

4. Florida Representative Geraldine Thompson filed a petition for quo warranto challenging the designation of Judge Francis for appointment.

5. By opinion dated Aug. 27, 2020, the Supreme Court denied the petition, thus leaving the appointment of Judge Francis intact. The Supreme Court ruled that the petition was well-taken because Judge Francis did not meet the experience requirement. However, the Court denied the petition because petitioner Thompson sought the wrong remedy by asking the Supreme Court to direct the Supreme Court Nominating Commission to submit a new list of nominees. The Court declined to disturb the appointment of Judge Francis.

6. Yesterday, September 8, 2020, the Supreme Court granted Representative Thompson's motion to amend her petition (See Exh. 1). The amended petition changed the requested relief. The amended petition asks the Supreme Court to require the Governor to make an immediate appointment from the seven remaining constitutionally eligible members of the already-existing list of nominees. As already stated, Judges Rowe and Osterhaus are on the list of nominees.

7. Yesterday, in its order on rehearing, the Supreme Court ordered the Governor to show cause by today, September 9, 2020, why that relief should not be granted. That order was the first indication any such relief was under active consideration, which would result in requiring a nomination from the existing list of seven qualified nominees.

8. From the circumstances just stated, a reasonable person would conclude the seven nominees are, or are highly likely to be, under active consideration for appointment to the Supreme Court of Florida.

9. The Governor is the appointing authority for Supreme Court vacancies. The Governor at the same time, is a party to this appeal, asking this Court to overturn the temporary injunction order entered below. The Governor is represented in this appeal by (among others) the Governor's general counsel. By long-standing custom, a Governor's general counsel is an advisor on judicial appointments.

MEMORANDUM

The Code of Judicial Conduct provides that “[a] judge shall disqualify himself or herself in a proceeding in which the judge’s impartiality might reasonably be questioned” Fla. Code Jud. Conduct, Canon 3E; Philip J. Padovano, *Florida Appellate Practice* § 7.4, at 163 (2020).

The disqualification procedure in an appellate court is set forth in *In re Estate of Carlton*, 378 So. 2d 1212, 1216-17 (Fla. 1979) (referral of motion to individual judge for decision).

The Florida Supreme Court has said, when disqualification is raised, “if predicated on grounds with a modicum of reason, the judge against whom raised should be prompt to recuse” *Dickenson v. Parks*, 140 So. 459, 462 (Fla. 1932); *see also Livingston v. State*, 441 So. 2d 1083, 1085 (Fla. 1983) (quoting *Dickenson v. Parks*, 140 So. 459, 462 (Fla. 1932)). A judge should not sit “whose neutrality is shadowed or even questioned.” *Dickenson*, 140 So. At 462.

As often quoted, the Court went on to say. “Every litigant . . . is entitled to nothing less than the cold neutrality of an impartial judge.” *Id.* (internal quotation marks omitted) (citation omitted).

In this case, Governor DeSantis is a party to this appeal, and is the appointing authority for making appointments to the Florida Supreme Court. Under the circumstances here, a nominee should not hear this appeal in which the

Governor is a party. Appellees respectfully submit they have a reasonable concern about impartiality under the circumstances outlined here.

Most respectfully, appellees request that Judges Rowe and Osterhaus disqualify themselves with respect to this appeal.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Katherine E. Giddings

KATHERINE E. GIDDINGS, BCS
(949396)
katherine.giddings@akerman.com
KRISTEN M. FIORE, BCS (25766)
kristen.fiore@akerman.com
elisa.miller@akerman.com
myndi.qualls@akerman.com
Akerman LLP
201 E. Park Ave., Suite 300
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
Telephone: (850) 224-9634
Facsimile: (850) 222-0103

GERALD B. COPE, JR. (251364)
gerald.cope@akerman.com
cary.gonzalez@akerman.com
Akerman LLP
Three Brickell City Centre
98 Southeast Seventh St., Suite 1600
Miami, FL 33131-1714
Telephone: (305) 374-5600
Facsimile: (305) 374-5095

RYAN D. O'CONNOR (106132)
ryan.oconnor@akerman.com
jann.austin@akerman.com
Akerman LLP
420 S. Orange Avenue, Suite 1200
Orlando, FL 32801

JACOB V. STUART (86977)
jvs@jacobstuartlaw.com
Jacob V. Stuart, P.A.
1601 East Amelia Street
Orlando, FL 32803
Telephone: (407) 434-0330

WILLIAM J. WIELAND II (84792)
billy@wdjustice.com
Wieland & Delattre, P.A.
226 Hillcrest Street
Orlando, FL 32801
Telephone: (407) 841-7699

*Counsel for Appellees in
Case No. 1D20-2472*

Telephone: (407) 419-8418
Facsimile: (407) 813-6610

*Counsel for Appellees in
Case No. 1D20-2470*

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY on this 9th day of September 2020 that a true and correct copy of the foregoing has been furnished by E-Mail to all parties below.

David M. Wells, Esq.
Nathan W. Hill, Esq.
Kenneth B. Bell, Esq.
Lauren v. Purdy, Esq.
Gunster, Yoakley & Stewart, P.A.
200 So. Orange Ave., Suite 1400
Orlando, FL 32801
dwells@gunster.com
nhill@gunster.com
kbell@gunster.com
lpurdy@gunster.com
awinsor@gunster.com
dculmer@gunster.com
eservice@gunster.com
***Counsel for Appellants in
Case Nos. 1D20-2470 & 1D20-2472***

Joseph W. Jacquot, Esq.
General Counsel
Raymond F. Treadwell, Esq.
Deputy General Counsel
Joshua E. Pratt, Esq.
Assistant General Counsel
Executive Office of
Governor Ron DeSantis
Office of General Counsel
The Capitol, PL-5
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399
Joe.Jacquot@eog.myflorida.com
Ray.Treadwell@eog.myflorida.com
Joshua.Pratt@eog.myflorida.com
Ashley.Tardo@eog.myflorida.com
Counsel for Governor Ron DeSantis in

Kendall B. Coffey, Esq.
Josefina M. Aguila, Esq.
Scott A. Hiaasen, Esq.
Coffey Burlington, P.L.
2601 S. Bayshore Drive Ph 1
Miami, FL 333133-5460
kcoffey@coffeyburlington.com
jaguila@coffeyburlington.com
shiaasen@coffeyburlington.com
yvb@coffeyburlington.com
service@coffeyburlington.com
lperez@coffeyburlington.com
***Trial Counsel for Appellees in
Case No. 1D20-2470***

Lucia Piva, Esq.
Mark Richard, Esq.
Kathleen M. Phillips, Esq.
Phillips, Richard & Rind, P.A.
9360 SW 72nd Street, Suite 283
Miami, FL 33173
lpiva@phillipsrichard.com
mrichard@phillipsrichard.com
kphillips@phillipsrichard.com
Trial Counsel for Appellees

Kimberly C. Menchion, Esq.
Florida Education Association
213 S. Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32302
kimberly.menchion@floridaea.org
***Trial Counsel for Appellees in
Case Nos. 1D20-2470***

Case Nos. 1D20-2470 & 1D20-2472

Matthew H. Mears, Esq.

General Counsel

Judy Bone, Esq.

Deputy General Counsel

Jamie M. Braum, Esq.

Assistant General Counsel

Department of Education

325 W. Gaines St., Suite 1544

Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

matthew.mears@fldoe.org

judy.bone@fldoe.org

jamie.braum@fldoe.org

Counsel for Appellants Richard Corcoran, in his official capacity as Commissioner of Education; the Florida Department of Education, and the Florida Board of Education in Case No. 1D20-2470

William E. Ploss, Esq.

75 Miracle Mile, Unit 347967

Coral Gables, FL 33234-5099

wepwep1@gmail.com

Counsel for Amicus Curiae, the Florida Alliance of Retired Americans

Ronald G. Meyer, Esq.

Meyer, Brooks, Blohm and Hearn, P.A.

P.O. Box 1547

Tallahassee, FL 32302

rmeyer@meyerbrookslaw.com

Trial Counsel for Appellees in Case Nos. 1D20-2470

Raquel A. Rodriguez, Esq.

Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC

One Biscayne Tower

2 S. Biscayne Blvd., Ste. 1500

Miami, FL 33131-1822

raquel.rodriguez@bipc.com

soraya.hamilton@bipc.com

Counsel for Amicus Curiae, the Foundation for Excellence in Education, Inc.

Jarrett B. Davis, Esq.

Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC

401 E. Jackson Street, Suite 2400

Tampa, FL 33602

jarrett.davis@bipc.com

Counsel for Amicus Curiae, the Foundation for Excellence in Education, Inc.

/ Katherine E. Giddings

KATHERINE E. GIDDINGS, BCS

Supreme Court of Florida

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2020

CASE NO.: SC20-985

REPRESENTATIVE GERALDINE F. THOMPSON, ETC. vs. GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS, ET AL.

Petitioner(s)

Respondent(s)

Representative Geraldine Thompson asks this Court to either (1) grant rehearing of our August 27 decision denying her petition or (2) allow her to amend the petition. Thompson remains committed to challenging Governor DeSantis's appointment of Judge Renatha Francis to this Court, on the ground that Francis was constitutionally ineligible at the time of her appointment and remains so now. What is new is Thompson's requested relief.

Thompson's initial petition asked us to require the judicial nominating commission to certify a new slate of constitutionally eligible nominees and then direct the Governor to make an appointment from that new list. We deemed such relief legally unavailable and denied Thompson's petition. In her motion for rehearing or for permission to amend, Thompson seeks different relief: she asks that we require the Governor to make an immediate appointment from among the seven remaining, constitutionally eligible nominees whom the JNC certified to the Governor on January 23, 2020. Abandoning her earlier focus on securing the

appointment of a constitutionally eligible African-American candidate, Thompson now maintains that she “opposes any decision which permits the Governor to unlawfully appoint a constitutionally-unqualified candidate to the Florida Supreme Court.”

We deny Thompson’s motion for rehearing, because she has not shown that our decision overlooked or misapprehended any relevant points of law or fact. *See* Fla. R. App. P. 9.330(a)(2)(A). However, we grant Thompson’s motion to amend her petition, and we order the Governor to show cause why the amended petition should not be granted.

Analysis

Thompson’s request to amend her petition is governed by Rule of Appellate Procedure 9.040(d). In pertinent part that rule says: “At any time in the interest of justice, the court may permit any part of the proceeding to be amended so that it may be disposed of on the merits.” The rule’s committee notes, which we deem persuasive but not binding, say that “[a]mendments should be liberally allowed under this rule, including pleadings in the lower tribunal, if it would not result in irreparable prejudice.”

This is an original proceeding. Therefore, our understanding of the meaning and application of rule 9.040(d) is informed by the jurisprudence surrounding the rule's similarly worded counterpart in the rules of civil procedure, rule 1.190(e). Florida courts applying rule 1.190(e) long ago established that the public policy of our state favors the liberal amendment of pleadings and that "courts should resolve all doubts in favor of allowing the amendment of pleadings to allow cases to be decided on their merit." *Newberry Square Fla. Laundromat, LLC v. Jim's Coin Laundry & Dry Cleaners, Inc.*, 296 So. 3d 584, 588 (Fla. 1st DCA 2020) (quoting *Sorenson v. Bank of N.Y. Mellon as Tr. for Certificate Holders CWALT, Inc.*, 261 So. 3d 660, 663 (Fla. 2d DCA 2018)). Another guiding principle is that "[t]he primary consideration in determining whether a motion for leave to amend should be granted is whether the opposing party would be prejudiced by the amendment." Philip J. Padovano, *Florida Civil Practice* § 7:10 n.16 (2020 ed.).

We believe that the interests of justice favor allowing Thompson to amend her petition. The Governor does not argue that allowing the amendment would cause him any prejudice, and we see none. Nor is this a case where Thompson has abused the privilege to amend or where an amendment would be futile. *See*

Newberry, 296 So. 3d at 589 (identifying these as standards for evaluating leave to amend). And finally, to the extent that Thompson’s petition implicates both a public right and the institutional integrity of this Court, allowing an amendment would serve the public interest. To deny Thompson’s request to amend in these circumstances would not be a proper exercise of our discretion.

The arguments against allowing an amendment are unpersuasive. The Governor first maintains that the request for amendment “falls outside the bounds of” rule 9.040(d). Focusing on the text’s reference to amendment “so that [the proceeding] may be disposed of on the merits,” the Governor claims that an amendment should not be allowed because this Court’s decision already addressed the merits of Thompson’s petition. The Governor cites no case law supporting this interpretation of the rule.

We do not see an inconsistency between the text of rule 9.040(d) and allowing Thompson to amend her petition. Thompson’s initial request for legally unavailable relief *prevented* this Court from possibly ruling consistent with Thompson’s meritorious constitutional claims. Permitting an amendment now would thus further the rule’s textually expressed purpose of allowing this Court to dispose of Thompson’s claims on the merits. While the Governor understandably

questions the *timing* of Thompson’s request to amend, that concern goes to whether the request causes prejudice or abuses the privilege to amend. Both factors are absent here. *Cf. Armiger v. Associated Outdoor Clubs, Inc.*, 48 So. 3d 864, 870 (Fla. 2d DCA 2010) (absent prejudice, abuse of privilege, or futility, leave to amend may be granted even after hearing and ruling on summary judgment).

The Governor also argues that the request to amend “offends traditional notions of judicial estoppel and the like” and violates the “election of remedies doctrine.” Application of judicial estoppel involves many conditions. But “[a]t its core [the doctrine] requires a showing that a litigant successfully maintained a position in one proceeding while taking an inconsistent position in a later proceeding, and that the other party was misled and changed its position in such a way that it would be unjust to allow the litigant to take the inconsistent position.” *Crawford Residences, LLC v. Banco Popular N. Am.*, 88 So. 3d 1017, 1020 (Fla. 2d DCA 2012). This clearly does not describe the circumstances here. As for the election of remedies doctrine, its role is to “prevent double recoveries for a single wrong.” *Holmes Reg’l Medical Ctr., Inc. v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 225 So. 3d 780, 787

(Fla. 2017) (quoting *Liddle v. A.F. Dozer, Inc.*, 777 So. 2d 421, 422 (Fla. 4th DCA 2000)). This too is inapposite.

Conclusion

Thompson's motion for rehearing is denied. Her motion for leave to amend is granted. In light of the legal analysis in our August 27 decision and the authority of *Pleus v. Crist*, 14 So. 3d 941 (Fla. 2009), the Governor is ordered to show cause why he should not be required immediately to fill the vacancy in office of justice of the supreme court by appointing a candidate who was on the JNC's certified list of January 23, 2020, and is now constitutionally eligible for appointment. The Governor shall respond by Wednesday, September 9, 2020. If Thompson chooses to reply, she must do so by Thursday, September 10, 2020.

It is so ordered.

CANADY, C.J., and POLSTON, LABARGA, LAWSON, and MUÑIZ, JJ., concur.

A True Copy
Test:



John A. Tomasino
Clerk, Supreme Court



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Served:

JESSE MICHAEL PANUCCIO

NICHOLAS A. PRIMROSE

LISABETH J. FRYER

JOSHUA E. PRATT

WILLIAM R. PONALL

KASEY O'CONNER

JOE JACQUOT

DANIEL NORDBY