

Hon. Judge Rachel Bell's Court Runs Normal

By Clint Confehr

NASHVILLE, TN — Davidson County General Sessions Court Judge Rachel L. Bell works under long-standing local court rules and federal law, she said Monday, offering transparency on how she presides.

Judge Bell has been criticized for not calling her own docket. However, her practice is similar to other judges' management, she said. Dockets may be called by a court officer without a judge present. It's standard in other counties. Meanwhile, Judge Bell is dealing with a medical condition that she was, at first, reluctant to discuss publicly.

Judge Bell has managed Type 1 diabetes for 25 years and a thyroid condition for 11 years, she said. Bell is approaching the conclusion of a 12-month diabetes self-management education program at the Eskind Diabetes Clinic at Vanderbilt Medical Center.

Complications from her thyroid required adjustments to her medication, she said. So, Bell is using accommodations available under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"My ADA accommodations have been approved by Human Resources and the General Sessions Court Administrators Office," she said. "I am thankful that there are federal guidelines in place for those with disabilities when they need them."

Her condition "is not something you can fix in a day," she said. "It sometimes takes 3-4 months."

Metropolitan General Sessions



Judge Rachel L. Bell

Court Local Rules of Practice, including No. 4.01 adopted in 2009, permit first call of civil dockets by a courtroom deputy.

"My court room starts on time everyday and all cases are completed the day they are on the docket, unless continued by agreement," Bell said.

"I allow time for settlement and discussion to determine which cases are ready to proceed. After settlement and discussion, I take the bench."

When Bell was an attorney, some judges proceeded toward trial, a preliminary hearing, or a motion, thereby eliminating opportunities to know available alternatives. Judges have the authority to run their courtrooms in various ways.

"The district attorney needs time to convey offers," she said.

"I want to be transparent," Bell said, thanking the community for its support and understanding. "I wanted to keep this health matter private."

Bell feels she's been forced to speak up and has come to understand transparency is needed.

Her use of ADA accommodations is temporary, she said.

Several months have passed as she and her physician have been adjusting her medications to bring her body chemistry into balance, Bell said.

Judge Bell was elected in 2014 to an eight-year term. In May this year, questions were raised about her administration of the courts where she presides. That's several months into the 12-month diabetes program.

"I am a very compassionate judge and I'm concerned with people's lives and rendering justice," she said.

Judge Bell restricted her statements to her medical condition and courtroom administration.

"People need to be more aware of the law and how it applies to their lives," she said. Therefore, she's exploring opportunities to inform the public in The Tennessee Tribune column.

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I-r; Tennessee State University President Dr. Glenda Glover and Grant Winrow at the White House

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