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## Cobb Prosecutor to Lead Judicial Oversight Agency

"I think Chuck Boring is an excellent choice," said retired King & Spalding partner and JQC director Ben Easterlin. "In my experience with him, he's been most impressive."

By Katheryn Tucker | November 06, 2019



**Chuck Boring, assistant district attorney, Cobb County, Georgia. (Photo: Rebecca Breyer)**

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The Georgia Judicial Qualifications Commission has hired a new director: Cobb County Chief Assistant District Attorney Charles “Chuck” Boring.

Boring will succeed retired King & Spalding partner Ben Easterlin as director of the state’s judicial watchdog agency.

“I think Chuck Boring is an excellent choice,” Easterlin said Tuesday. “In my experience with him, he’s been most impressive.”

Boring said Tuesday that the new job is “an opportunity for me to positively impact an entire branch of government.” He added, “I appreciate the commission taking a chance on me for an important position like this.”

The JQC enlisted Boring’s help earlier this year on two prosecutions of judges accused of misconduct. Around that time, Easterlin announced his plans to retire, and the JQC began seeking candidates for a replacement. Boring said someone suggested he apply, and he did.

When the deadline passed at the end of September, 20 candidates had applied. The commission narrowed the list to eight and interviewed them.

“Chuck had the overall qualifications to jump right in and get the job done,” said JQC investigative panel chair Pope Langdale III of Langdale Vallotton in Valdosta. “We had a lot of really good qualified candidates. We’re proud of the people who wanted to take on this very important job.”

The JQC was abolished in 2016 by the Georgia General Assembly and the voters, then reconstituted in 2017 with two divisions—an investigative panel and a hearing panel.

Langdale said Boring’s experience would serve him well in investigating judges, answering ethical questions and offering advice to judges to help them avoid conflicts with the rules for their conduct.

Langdale said he sees the job as an “excellent step” for Boring, too. “He stays in his wheelhouse of pursuing justice,” Langdale said. “I think it’s the most important lawyer job in the state of Georgia.”

Both Langdale and Easterlin said they believe they have fulfilled the goals of the transition. They’ve created a new organization, made it possible to file complaints online on a revamped website and established the commission’s first permanent office in the justice building across the street from the Capitol.

“This is just another step toward making this reconstituted agency more professional and better at what it’s trying to do,” Easterlin said.

Langdale expressed gratitude for Easterlin, who retired from King & Spalding in 2016 and was asked to lead the JQC’s transition. “Ben has done a fantastic job. He’s done what he’s been asked to do. He really has given up a lot of his time and energy at a time in his life when he could easily have retired and traveled with his wife.”

Easterlin, 70, has been married for 47 years, he said Tuesday. He joked that his wife is “the only person who’s worried” about his second retirement.

Boring is 44. His compensation for the job will be \$160,000 a year, plus state benefits, Langdale said. He added that the pay represents a slight decrease from the previous director’s salary to reflect the 3% budget reductions Gov. Brian Kemp has requested from all state agencies.

Both Easterlin and Langdale said they hope Boring will be able to serve long term and offer stability to an organization that has been through at least five directors in a decade.

Boring’s last day in the Cobb County DA’s office will be Nov. 22, and he will start at the JQC on Dec. 2, he said Tuesday.

“My heart has been in this job,” Boring said of his work in the DA’s office, where he has focused on crimes against children and women in the special victims unit. “It took a special opportunity to get me to leave.”

Boring has been a prosecutor for his entire 19-year legal career. His first job out of Georgia State University College of Law was with the Coweta Judicial Circuit handling all types of cases. During his three and a half years there, he found a niche with special victims, even though the office didn't have such a unit.

The rest of his career has been with the Cobb DA—with a five-year interruption to prosecute murder cases for the Fulton County DA's office.

Boring made headlines for winning a 2016 murder conviction in the case of Justin Ross Harris, who was accused of intentionally leaving his toddler to die in a hot car. The case ignited even more notoriety when evidence emerged of Harris sending sexually explicit text messages and pictures to various women while he was in his office that summer work day. Harris is now serving a life sentence with no chance of parole.

Boring has also won a string of convictions in other cases—lower-profile cases, but many involving unspeakable horrors.

One of them led a judge to say to a convicted child molester, "You have a hole in your soul."

In another, Boring's opposing counsel—representing a man accused of sexually abusing a niece starting when she was 11 years old—said Boring surprised him by waiving the prosecution's chance to make the first closing argument. Defense attorney Justin Wyatt said in 2014 that it was the first one in seven cases together in which Boring chose only to speak last—instead of first and last, as the prosecution is entitled to do. Wyatt went ahead with his closing argument, highlighting a list of reasons the testimony of the then-19-year-old victim wasn't credible. But while he was talking, Boring was crafting a PowerPoint presentation to refute everything. When it was Boring's turn to speak, he showed the presentation to the jurors. "He was able to flip all of my arguments in his favor," Wyatt said at the time. Boring showed the jury that Wyatt's efforts to discredit the witness—for such points as staying silent, delaying disclosure, suffering from other problems—were all symptoms common to survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Boring said he has always been able to compartmentalize his disturbing work but admitted Tuesday that has become more difficult over time. The load has been more widely shared, though, as he has moved into a leadership role with the DA's office, providing direction for 18 other attorneys.

"I'm excited to be able to do something a little bit different," Boring said, noting the broadening of his platform from one county to all 159 across the state.

"A great portion of this job is going to be education and training, talking to judges, advising them with clear direction on ethical rules. The goal would be not to have any complaints that are founded anyway," Boring said. "I see there being a difference between a judge who makes a mistake that you can rectify and misconduct."

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