

Judges take selves off principal assault case

By Michael Stone

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All five Hamilton County General Sessions Court judges have recused themselves in an assault case involving a local principal because they sometimes work with the principal's husband.

"It doesn't mean we couldn't be unbiased, but ... we have a relationship with him," Judge Christie Mahn Sell said of Shawn Johnson, the county's criminal justice public safety coordinator. A duty of the position is relaying information between courts and law enforcement.

Johnson, 39, allegedly was kicked by his wife, East Lake Elementary Principal Stacy Johnson, in late September during an argument at their Signal Mountain home. The two are going through a divorce, the police report states.

This is the first time during Mahn Sell's four-year tenure as a judge that all General Sessions Court judges have recused themselves from a case, she said.

"It's just not that common," Mahn Sell said.

Requests for a judge outside the county have been made, Mahn Sell said, and court officials are waiting for a reply.

If no judge accepts, the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts will take over the search for a new judge.

"Our job is to try and find someone else," said Laura Click, the office's spokeswoman. "We call that a designation process. It is rare, but it does happen, especially dealing with county matters."

The process probably won't be necessary, Mahn Sell said, because judges are typically "very accommodating."

According to police reports, Shawn Johnson had a "large red mark" on his right leg when police went to the Johnsons' home.

Officials from Hamilton County schools previously announced that Stacy Johnson, 39, would remain an employee of the school system "pending the outcome of legal proceedings."