

**COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
FRANKLIN CIRCUIT COURT
DIVISION I
CONSOLIDATED CIVIL ACTION NOS. 26-CI-00885;
26-CI-01010; 26-CI-01017**

RAMSI A. WOODCOCK

PLAINTIFF

v.

ORDER DENYING TEMPORARY INJUNCTION

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY, et al.

DEFENDANTS

This matter is before the Court on the Plaintiff's motion for a temporary injunction regarding his claims surrounding the appointment of Defendant Gregory Van Tatenhove as Dean of the law school at the Defendant University of Kentucky. Plaintiff Ramsi Woodcock (Professor Woodcock) asserts that the appointment of Van Tatenhove, over the objections of the faculty, constitutes a violation of his rights and that he is suffering irreparable injury as a result. The Court held an evidentiary hearing on Wednesday, September 30, 2026. All parties were represented by counsel and have fully briefed the motion. Being sufficiently advised, Professor Woodcock's motion is **DENIED** for reasons more fully stated below.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Professor Woodcock, in this motion, challenges the decision of the University of Kentucky to hire Defendant Gregory Van Tatenhove as Dean of the law school. Although there are many additional issues in dispute between Professor Woodcock and the University, the scope of this motion is limited to the issue of whether he is entitled to injunctive relief that would set aside Dean Van Tatenhove's appointment and direct the University to install interim leadership at the law school until a new Dean who is judged to be qualified by the faculty is appointed.

In addition to his own testimony, Professor Woodcock presented testimony from Professor (and former Dean) Mary Davis, James Dovovan (Director of the UK Law Library and member of the faculty), and Professor Douglas Michael. The testimony from the law school witnesses established important facts that are critical in understanding this dispute in context, the most important of which may be the fact that there were two failed searches to fill the Dean position prior to the search that culminated in the appointment of Dean Van Tatenhove.

The failure of the first two national searches to fill the critical position of Dean of the law school provides vital context for the strong feelings of Professor Woodcock, and other members of the faculty, that the selection of Dean Van Tatenhove was legally flawed and academically unacceptable. It appears that all the candidates designated as finalists in the first two searches were deemed by the faculty to be qualified to serve as Dean. However, none of them were hired, and it is unclear whether the Provost and President even extended offers to the qualified candidates in the second search. The testimony established that the faculty participated in good faith in each of the searches, that the University failed to hire, or even extend offers, to numerous well-qualified candidates approved by the faculty, and then hired the only candidate who was deemed unqualified by the faculty. It also appears that Provost DiPaola, the University, and the Board only provided the most perfunctory explanation of why the University rejected the faculty's recommendations. In these circumstances, it is easy to see why many faculty members, including Professor Woodcock, have questioned the good faith of those in charge of making this hiring decision, from the Provost to the President to the Board. This atmosphere of lack of trust and failures to communicate frames the issues that gave rise to this lawsuit.

The two failed searches were conducted under the supervision of Provost DiPaola. The testimony established a profound lack of trust between Provost DiPaola and the law faculty, which

is a matter that has profound implications for the future of the law school (and the University). While the Court agrees that the utter failure of the hiring process through the first two searches demands close review and scrutiny, the Court also recognizes that it is not the proper forum for that kind of much-needed oversight and accountability. While Professor Woodcock has raised very legitimate questions as to the academic issues and the hiring process, he has failed to demonstrate, at this point, that those questions implicate his legal rights as a member of the faculty.

Professor Woodcock argues that the repeated failures of the search process, culminating in the hiring of Dean Van Tatenhove over the objections of a substantial majority of the law faculty, raise issues concerning accreditation by the American Bar Association (ABA). The testimony established that a complaint has been filed with the ABA and that the ABA is undertaking a review of the matter. Professor Woodcock, and some of the faculty witnesses, expressed concern that Dean Van Tatenhove's lack of experience in academic administration renders him unqualified to make decisions regarding hiring, retention, promotion, and tenure for faculty members. Once again, these are serious matters that are outside the purview of this Court. If the ABA finds a violation of its standards, then the testimony indicates that it will provide an opportunity for the University to address such problems and to come back into compliance.

Moreover, the testimony further establishes that there is substantial doubt that the hiring of Dean Van Tatenhove violated ABA standards. On cross-examination of the faculty witnesses, the University provided several examples of accredited law schools that had hired Deans with educational and professional credentials similar to Dean Van Tatenhove. The primary concerns voiced with Dean Van Tatenhove's qualifications arise from his lack of academic experience; yet, it is clear that the hiring of a Law School Dean with primarily non-academic credentials is allowed by the ABA in "extraordinary circumstances." Many of the qualities of a successful dean,

including leadership skills, communication skills, fundraising ability, cultivation of public support for the school among alumni and citizens, and expertise in budget and administration, are not academic in nature. While Professor Woodcock expressed concern about Dean Van Tatenhove's commitment to academic freedom and vigorous scholarship (especially those involving matters of public controversy), those concerns are speculative at this juncture. In light of Professor Woodcock's own experience over the last two years, he has a valid basis for such concerns, but the Court finds no immediate and irreparable injury arising from the appointment of Dean Van Tatenhove. The actions of the University, the Provost, and the law school that gave rise to Professor Woodcock's other claims involving the alleged violation of his civil rights, were all taken prior to Dean Van Tatenhove's appointment.

The Court must emphasize the extraordinary nature of the relief sought by Professor Woodcock. For a court of general jurisdiction to inject itself into the appointment process for the position of Dean in a public university would be an unprecedented form of relief. The Court has noted the supplemental authorities cited by Professor Woodcock, but it is still at a loss to find a statutory or constitutional basis for the granting of injunctive relief prior to the adjudication of these claims on the merits.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

In Kentucky, a plaintiff must show the following factors to obtain a temporary injunction: 1) a substantial legal question on the merits; 2) immediate and irreparable injury pending trial on the merits; 3) a balancing of the equities weighs in favor of injunctive relief; and 4) the public interest supports injunctive relief. *Maupin v. Stansbury*, 575 S.W.2d 695, 698-99 (Ky. App. 1978).

The showing of irreparable injury "is a mandatory prerequisite to the issuance of any injunction." *Id.* at 699. The initial threshold of demonstrating an immediate and irreparable injury

arising from a concrete violation of a personal right has not been met in this case. Professor Woodcock has not demonstrated that he has a personal right not to have Dean Van Tatenhove govern the law school faculty, nor has he shown a concrete violation of such an alleged right. Any injury to Professor Woodcock resulting from Dean Van Tatenhove's appointment is speculative, at best.

Further, Professor Woodcock must present a substantial legal question regarding the Dean's appointment and the violation of a "concrete personal right." The Court reiterates that is unsure which statute or case law would support judicial intervention in the appointment process for a dean of a public university's academic program. While the Court cannot at this point say that it would be impossible for Professor Woodcock to present a substantial legal question on the merits of this case, it is evident that such a showing would require a much more extensive factual and legal record.

With regard to balancing of the equities and consideration of the public interest, the record from the hearing is, at best, ambiguous. Since the relief requested is unprecedented, it is difficult to predict the short-term and long-term impact on the operation of the law school. One of the important factors discussed in *Maupin* is "whether the injunction will merely preserve the status quo." *Id.* Here, the issuance of an injunction would radically upset the existing status quo, which potentially could cause chaos in administration of the law school. The *Maupin* Court also counseled that "the actual overall merits of the case are not to be addressed in CR 65.04 motions." Here, Professor Woodcock is essentially seeking to break new ground in higher education law by advancing a legal claim that would amount, as a practical matter, to a veto of the appointment of the Dean by the faculty. If Professor Woodcock were to prevail on these claims, injunctive remedies might be considered. But until full adjudication of the merits, it is difficult to fathom how

a court could intervene in the administration of an academic institution in this manner during the pendency of the lawsuit without creating more problems that it would solve. Thus, the balance of the equities and the public interest weigh against the granting of a temporary injunction. The *Maupin* case counsels that “doubtful cases should await trial on the merits.” *Id.* at 698. This is just such a case.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, Professor Woodcock’s Motion for a Temporary Injunction under CR 65.04 is **DENIED**.

SO ORDERED this 13th day of October 2026.



PHILLIP J. SHEPHERD, JUDGE
Franklin Circuit Court, Division I

DISTRIBUTION:

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