



NEW YORK STATE
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICER

NEWS RELEASE

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City Court Judge in Westchester County Should be Censured for Practicing Law and Invoking His Judicial Status

The New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that William Edwards, a full-time Judge of the Mount Vernon City Court, Westchester County, should be censured for appearing as his daughter's attorney on three occasions in an Upstate New York court and for repeatedly and gratuitously identifying himself as a judge during the proceedings.

Judge Edwards agreed to the censure.

Full-time judges are prohibited from practicing law by the Rules Governing Judicial Conduct. Nevertheless, on three occasions between November 2015 and April 2016, Judge Edwards appeared and acted as his daughter's attorney in an upstate Family Court matter. During two of those appearances, Judge Edwards repeatedly made comments to the presiding judge identifying himself as a judge.

In May 2016, after Judge Edwards was informed by his Supervising Judge that as a full-time judge he could not practice law, he immediately retained an attorney for his daughter.

The Commission said that Judge Edwards's conduct "comes close to warranting removal," but censure was appropriate because he has "admitted that his conduct warrants public discipline" and because the Commission believes he will strictly abide by all the Rules from now on.

Judge Edwards has served as a Judge of the Mount Vernon City Court since 2003. His current term expires on December 31, 2023.

Statement by Commission Administrator

Commission Administrator Robert H. Tembeckjian made the following statement.

"It is bad enough for a full-time judge to practice law, even on behalf of a family member. Repeatedly mentioning one's own judicial status during the proceedings compounds the original misconduct and comes across as an obvious attempt to influence the trial judge. Here, Judge Edwards has admitted wrongdoing, and the Commission believes he deserves another chance."

The Commission Proceedings

Judge Edwards was served with a Formal Written Complaint dated June 15, 2018, containing one charge and filed an Answer dated August 3, 2018.

On September 4, 2019, the Administrator of the Commission, Judge Edwards and his attorney entered into an Agreed Statement of Facts, stipulating to the facts and sanction and waiving further submissions and oral argument.

The Commission accepted the Agreed Statement on December 5, 2019.

The Commission Determination

The Commission filed a determination dated December 20, 2019, in which ten members concurred: Joseph W. Belluck, Esq. (the Commission Chair), Paul B. Harding, Esq. (the Vice Chair), Jodie Corngold, Judge John A. Falk, Taa Grays, Esq., Judge Leslie G. Leach, Judge Angela M. Mazzarelli, Judge Robert J. Miller, Marvin Ray Raskin, Esq., and Akosua Garcia Yeboah. Mr. Raskin filed an opinion dissenting as to the sanction, voting that the judge should be removed from office.

There is currently one vacancy on the 11-member Commission.

Court of Appeals Review

The Commission transmitted its determination to the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, pursuant to Judiciary Law Section 44, subdivision 7. Judge Edwards received it on December 23, 2019, and the Commission was subsequently notified by the Court of Appeals that service was complete. Consequently, the matter is now public.

A judge may either accept the Commission's determination or, within 30 days from receipt, make a written request to the Chief Judge for a review of the determination by the Court of Appeals.

Pursuant to Judiciary Law Section 44, subdivision 7, if Judge Edwards does not request review by the Court of Appeals, the Commission will censure him in accordance with the determination.

If a Commission determination is reviewed by the Court of Appeals, the Court may accept the determined sanction, impose a different sanction including admonition, censure or removal, or impose no sanction.

Statistics Relating to Prior Determinations

Since 1978, the Commission has issued 329 determinations of censure against judges in New York State. The Commission has issued 173 determinations of removal and 272 determinations of admonition.

The Court of Appeals has reviewed 99 Commission determinations. The Court accepted the Commission's sanctions in 83 cases (74 of which were removals, six were censures and three were admonitions). Of the remaining 16 cases, two sanctions were increased from censure to removal, and 13 were reduced: nine removal determinations were modified to censure, one removal was modified to admonition, two censures were modified to admonition, and one censure was rejected and the charges dismissed. The Court remitted one matter to the Commission for further proceedings. One request for review is pending.

Counsel

In the proceedings before the Commission, Judge Edwards was represented by Amy L. Bellantoni, Esq., 2 Overhill Road, Suite 400, Scarsdale, New York 10583, (914) 367-0090.

The Commission was represented by Robert H. Tembeckjian, Administrator and Counsel to the Commission; Mark Levine, Deputy Administrator in Charge of the New York City office; and Senior Attorney Brenda Correa. Investigator Andrew Zagami assisted in the investigation.

Background Information on Judge Edwards

First took office:	2003
Year Admitted to NYS Bar:	1984
Current Term Expires:	December 31, 2023

Members of the Commission

The Commission members serve four-year terms. A list of members is appended.

The Public File

The determination is attached. The record of the proceedings upon which the determination is based is available for inspection by appointment during regular business hours at the Commission's three offices:

61 Broadway Suite 1200 New York, New York 10006	Corning Tower, Suite 2301 Empire State Plaza Albany, New York 12223	400 Andrews Street Suite 700 Rochester, New York 14604
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MEMBERS OF THE STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Member	Appointing Authority	Term End
Joseph W. Belluck, Esq., Chair	Governor Andrew M. Cuomo	March 31, 2020
Paul B. Harding, Esq., Vice Chair	Assembly Minority Leader Brian M. Kolb	March 31, 2021
Jodie Corngold	Governor Andrew M. Cuomo	March 31, 2023
Taa Grays, Esq.	Former Senate Minority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins	March 31, 2020
Hon. John A. Falk	Chief Judge Janet DiFiore	March 31, 2021
Hon. Leslie G. Leach	Chief Judge Janet DiFiore	March 31, 2020
Hon. Angela M. Mazzairelli	Chief Judge Janet DiFiore	March 31, 2022
Hon. Robert J. Miller	Governor Andrew M. Cuomo	March 31, 2022
Marvin Ray Raskin, Esq.	Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie	March 31, 2022
Akosua Garcia Yeboah	Governor Andrew M. Cuomo	March 31, 2021
Vacant	Senate President Pro Tem Andrea Stewart-Cousins	March 31, 2023