

STATE OF MARYLAND

BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL DISABILITIES

IN THE MATTER OF: *
* CJD 2016-148
JUDGE JOSEPH L. WRIGHT *
*

To: JUDGE JOSEPH L. WRIGHT
DISTRICT COURT OF MARYLAND FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
FIFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

CHARGES

TAKE NOTICE that the Commission on Judicial Disabilities (hereinafter "Commission") has caused to be made and completed an investigation, through its Special Investigative Counsel, Thomas M. DeGonia, II, Esq., of Judge Joseph L. Wright (hereinafter sometimes referred to as "Judge"), who was, at all pertinent times, a Judge of the District Court of Maryland for Prince George's County. The Commission notified Judge Wright of the nature of the investigation and afforded the Judge an opportunity to present information bearing on the subject of the investigation.

The Commission has received and considered information from the investigation, including, but not limited to: information received from numerous sources, materials provided by the Chief Judge of the District Court of Maryland, witness statements, the Judge's responses and all attachments and materials incorporated therein by reference, the recommendation of Special Investigative Counsel, the Reports of the Judicial Inquiry Board, and the letter from Judge Wright in response to the November 20, 2017 Report of the Judicial Inquiry Board. In consideration of the foregoing and a finding by the Commission of probable cause to believe that Judge Wright has committed sanctionable conduct, the Commission directed that Assistant

Investigative Counsel initiate formal proceedings against Judge Wright pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-407(a).

The Commission will conduct a public hearing on these charges pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-407. The following facts form the basis for these charges and the Commission's probable cause determination:

1. Judge Wright has served as a Judge of the District Court of Maryland for Prince George's County since 2012.
2. Based upon information received, the Commission's Investigative Counsel opened an investigation regarding Judge Wright's conduct while he was sitting in the District Court for Prince George's County. The investigation was then referred to and completed by Special Investigative Counsel. The investigation was focused on allegations that Judge Wright made material misrepresentations of fact on the Confidential Personal Data Questionnaire submitted by Judge Wright to the Judicial Nominating Commission and Administrative Office of the Courts in application to the bench of the Circuit Court for Prince George's County.
3. Special Investigative Counsel reviewed the statements of witnesses and conducted witness interviews. In addition, materials provided by the Chief Judge of the District Court of Maryland were reviewed and considered as part of this investigation.
4. The investigation revealed sanctionable conduct by Judge Wright with regard to his knowing and intelligent misrepresentation of a material fact on his Confidential Personal Data Questionnaire submitted to the Judicial Nominating Commission and Administrative Office of the Courts in application to the bench

of the Circuit Court for Prince George's County.

5. Judge Wright's conduct was in violation of Rules 18-100.4, Preamble; 18-101.1, Compliance with the Law; and 18-101.2, Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary. In addition, Judge Wright's conduct constituted misconduct and was prejudicial to the proper administration of justice pursuant to Rule 18-401(j). The pertinent provisions of the Rules provide as follows:

Rule 18-100.4. PREAMBLE.

(a) Importance of Independent, Fair, Competent, Impartial Judiciary. An independent, fair, competent, and impartial judiciary composed of men and women of integrity who will interpret and apply the law that governs our society is indispensable to our system of justice. Thus, the judiciary plays a central role in preserving the principles of justice and the rule of law. Inherent in all the Rules contained in this Code are the precepts that judges, individually and collectively, must respect and honor the judicial office as a public trust and strive to maintain and enhance confidence in the legal system.

(b) Dignity of Judicial Office. Judges should maintain the dignity of judicial office at all times, and avoid both impropriety and the appearance of impropriety in their professional and personal lives. They should aspire at all times to conduct that ensures the greatest possible public confidence in their independence, impartiality, integrity, and competence.

(c) Function of Code of Judicial Conduct. This Code of Judicial Conduct establishes standards for the ethical conduct of judges and judicial candidates. It is not intended as an exhaustive guide for the conduct of judges and judicial candidates, who are governed in their judicial and personal conduct by general ethical standards as well as by this Code. This Code is intended, however, to provide guidance and assist judges in maintaining the highest standards of judicial and personal conduct, and to provide a basis for regulating their conduct through disciplinary agencies.

Rule 18-101.1. COMPLIANCE WITH THE LAW.

A judge shall comply with the law, including this Code of Judicial Conduct.

Rule 18-101.2. PROMOTING CONFIDENCE IN THE JUDICIARY.

- (a) A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary.
- (b) A judge shall avoid conduct that would create in reasonable minds a perception of impropriety.

Rule 18-401(j)(1) DEFINITION OF SANCTIONABLE CONDUCT.

“Sanctionable Conduct” means misconduct while in office, the persistent failure by a judge to perform the duties of the judge’s office, or conduct prejudicial to the proper administration of justice. A judge’s violation of any of the provisions of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct promulgated by Title 18, Chapter 100 may constitute sanctionable conduct.

6. The investigation specifically revealed the following facts upon which the charges are based:

In July of 2016, Judge Wright completed and submitted an application to be considered for nomination as a Judge of the Circuit Court for Prince George’s County. As part of this application, he completed a Confidential Personal Data Questionnaire.

On this application, Judge Wright indicated that he understood that the representations made on the application, including the Confidential Personal Data Questionnaire, were subject to verification by the Judicial Nominating Commission.

Judge Wright knowingly and deliberately made material misrepresentations of fact in the Confidential Personal Data Questionnaire. During a telephone conversation on September 26, 2016, Judge Wright confirmed that he had made these misrepresentations on the Confidential Personal Data

Questionnaire.

7. Judge Wright's behavior provides evidence that Judge Wright engaged in conduct that was prejudicial to the proper administration of justice in Maryland Courts, pursuant to the Maryland Constitution, Article IV, Section 4B(b)(1).

These charges are issued by Assistant Investigative Counsel at the direction of the Commission on Judicial Disabilities.

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL DISABILITIES

Date: 3/5/18

Derek A. Bayne
Assistant Investigative Counsel

NOTICE: YOU HAVE THE RIGHT, PURSUANT TO RULE 18-407(c) OF THE MARYLAND RULES, TO FILE A WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THIS COMPLAINT WITHIN THIRTY (30) DAYS AFTER SERVICE OF THIS NOTICE UPON YOU. AN ORIGINAL AND ELEVEN (11) LEGIBLE COPIES OF THE RESPONSE ARE REQUIRED. THE RESPONSE SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO THE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL DISABILITIES.