

**STATE OF MARYLAND**

**BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL DISABILITIES**

<b>In the Matter of the</b>	*	
<b>HONORABLE VICKIE GIPSON</b>	*	<b>CJD 2024-051, CJD 2024-053,</b>
<b>Judge of the Orphans' Court for</b>	*	<b>CJD 2024-054, CJD 2024-069, &amp;</b>
<b>Anne Arundel County</b>	*	<b>CJD 2024-109</b>
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**FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW,**  
**ORDER AND RECOMMENDATION**

Pursuant to Charges filed by Investigative Counsel in CJD 2024-051, CJD 2024-053, CJD 2024-054, CJD 2024-069, and CJD 2024-109, and the response filed by Chief Judge Vickie Gipson (hereinafter “Respondent” or “Chief Judge Gipson”) through counsel, and prior written notice of hearing to Respondent, a public hearing was conducted in the above-entitled matter (hereinafter “Hearing”) by the Maryland Commission on Judicial Disabilities (hereinafter “Commission”), as authorized by Maryland Rules 18-431 and 18-434. Tanya C. Bernstein, Esq., Investigative Counsel, and Derek A. Bayne, Esq., Assistant Investigative Counsel, prosecuted the case against Respondent.

Pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-431(e)(1), the initial Notice of Hearing issued in these matters scheduled the public hearing for August 21, 22 and October 10, 2025, beginning at 9:00am at the Circuit Court for Howard County. The Hearing on the Charges occurred on August 21, and December 5, 2025. Investigative Counsel presented its case-in-chief and, with the permission of the Commission, submitted an exhibit for disposition purposes, if the Commission determined Respondent committed sanctionable conduct, on

August 22, 2025<sup>1</sup>. Respondent was present on December 5, 2025 and testified.

The following Commission Members participated in the Hearing<sup>2</sup>: The Honorable Anne K. Albright (Chair); the Honorable Lisa Hall Johnson (Vice-Chair); the Honorable Yolanda Tanner, Chaz R. Ball, Esq., Kimberly A. Howell, Dr. Alphonsus Korie, Marisa A. Trasatti, Esq, and Gerard Young. The eight Commission Members present at the Hearing constituted a quorum, pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-411(f).

After being fully advised of its obligations and duties, and having deliberated in private, the Commission found that the Hearing was conducted according to the rules, statutes, and procedures required by law. The Commission then considered the admitted evidence and the evidence admitted for limited purposes, assessed the reliability and credibility of the admitted evidence, and the arguments of the parties. The Commission has also considered the parties' proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

The Commission hereby issues the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, Order and Recommendation to the Supreme Court of Maryland as to the imposition of discipline, pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-435(e). All of the following factual findings, including those in the Procedural History and in the Findings of Fact, are made by clear and convincing evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Upon request of the Commission, Investigative Counsel provided a redacted copy of this exhibit for disposition purposes to the Commission on April 14, 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Tara A. Barnes, Esq. and Elizabeth A. Solar were present on August 21 but not on December 5, 2025. They did not participate in the deliberations of these matters. Andrea M. Fulton Rhodes did not participate in the Hearing of these matters.

## I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The investigation in this matter was undertaken following Investigative Counsel's receipt of multiple complaints against Chief Judge Gipson. In accord with Maryland Rule 18-422(a)(4)(C), Investigative Counsel notified Chief Judge Gipson of the pending investigations as well as her confidentiality obligation under Maryland Rule 18-407. Investigative Counsel also acknowledged receipt of complaints Chief Judge Gipson filed against another judge. Specifically, Chief Judge Gipson received the following:

- On April 26, and May 24, 2024, Investigative Counsel acknowledged receipt of complaints Chief Judge Gipson filed against another judge with a notification that “**investigations conducted by this office are required by law to be confidential.**” [IC4].
- On May 30, 2024, Chief Judge Gipson was notified by Investigative Counsel of investigations in the CJD 2024-050 (potential inappropriate and unprofessional demeanor at the courthouse), CJD 2025-052 (potential inappropriate and unprofessional demeanor at the courthouse), and CJD 2024-053 (potential inappropriate and unprofessional demeanor at the courthouse and failing to perform judicial and administrative duties diligently and promptly). Investigative Counsel's correspondence included a confidentiality notification that “[t]his communication and all future communications and information related to this investigation shall be **confidential in accordance with Rule 18-407.**” (emphasis in original). [IC2].
- On July 9, 2024, Investigative Counsel sent correspondence to Chief Judge Gipson, with updated case numbers from the May 30, 2024 notification, and reminded Respondent to provide response to the investigations in the CJD 2024-051 (previously identified as CJD 2024-050), CJD 2025-053 (previously identified as CJD 2024-052), and CJD 2024-054 (previously identified as CJD 2024-053), on or before July 19, 2024. [IC2].
- On July 17, 2024, Chief Judge Gipson was notified of the investigation in CJD 2024-069 (potential inappropriate and unprofessional demeanor toward Judge Marc Knapp; intimidating, harassing and retaliatory behavior toward

Judge Knapp; inducing individuals to file complaints against Judge Knapp; failing to perform judicial duties; and continuing the behavior described above after being asked to refrain). This notice again apprised Chief Judge Gipson of her confidentiality obligation.[IC2].

- On October 10, 2024, Chief Judge Gipson was notified of the investigation in CJD 2024-109 which included the aforementioned confidentiality notification. [IC2].

On February 25, 2025, Charges were initiated by Investigative Counsel against Chief Judge Gipson in **CJD 2024-051, CJD 2024-053, CJD 2024-054, CJD 2024-069, and CJD 2024-109** as directed by the Commission pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-431(a).

The Charges alleged that Chief Judge Gipson committed sanctionable conduct<sup>3</sup> in violation of Maryland Rules 18.101.1 (Compliance with the Law); 18-101.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary); 18-101.3 (Avoiding Lending the Prestige of Judicial Office); 18-102.3 (Bias, Prejudice, and Harassment); 18-102.5 (Competence, Diligence, and Cooperation); 18-102.8 (Decorum, Demeanor, and Communications with Jurors); 18-102.10 (Judicial Statements on Pending and Impending Cases); 18-102.12 (Supervisory Duties); 18-102.15 (Responding to Judicial and Attorney Misconduct); 18-102.16(a) (Cooperation with Disciplinary Authorities); and 18-103.1(d) and (e) (Extra-Official Activities in General).

After listing the Rules allegedly violated, the Charges specified the alleged conduct

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<sup>3</sup>“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 the provisions of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct promulgated by Title 18, Chapter 100 may constitute sanctionable conduct.” Md. Rule 18-402(m)(1).

that violated the Rules. Thus, the Charges detailed Chief Judge Gipson's (1) Improper Decorum, Interference with the Operations of the Orphans' Court, and Undermining Public Confidence in the Judiciary; (2) Lending the Prestige of Office to Advance Personal Interests and Public Comments on Pending Cases; (3) Breach of Confidentiality of Commission Matters; (4) Failure to Follow Legislatively Enacted Requirements for the Operation of the Orphans' Court and the Failure to Correct or Report the Misconduct of Others; and (5) Failure to Cooperate with Commission Directives. Chief Judge Gipson filed a Response to the Charges on March 21, 2025, through counsel.<sup>4</sup>

At the Hearing, Investigative Counsel called nine witnesses: Deborah Cheek (Auditor and Assistant Court Administrator for the Anne Arundel County Register of Wills), Hon. David Duba (Former Anne Arundel County Orphans' Court Judge), Lauren Heath (Front Desk Supervisor for Anne Arundel County Register of Wills), Officer Brenden King (Anne Arundel County Police Department), Hon. Marc Knapp (Anne Arundel County Orphan's Court Judge), Eunice Owens (Court Administrator for Anne Arundel County Register of Wills), Karen Recinos (Deputy for Anne Arundel County Register of Wills), Detective Daniel Rodriguez (Anne Arundel County Police Department), and Tameka Smith (Chief Deputy for Anne Arundel County Register of Wills). Investigative Counsel entered thirty exhibits into evidence; they are referred to herein as

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<sup>4</sup> On June 24, 2025, after Respondent's Counsel moved to withdraw her appearance, her appearance was stricken. Neither Respondent nor Investigative Counsel objected to Respondent's Counsel's withdrawal.

“[IC\_].” Investigative Counsel entered one joint exhibit. Respondent testified and did not call any witnesses. Respondent entered one exhibit into evidence; it is referred to herein as “[R\_].”

Having been invited to do so by the Commission, the parties each submitted proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

## **II. FINDINGS OF FACT**

The Commission assessed the credibility and reliability of all the evidence and considered the arguments of Respondent and Investigative Counsel. In general, the Commission found the witnesses credible. At certain points, the Respondent’s testimony was inconsistent, evasive, not credible, and/or not supported by the documentary evidence. Respondent focused on the conflicts with her judicial colleague, but was reluctant to address and accept responsibility for her conduct.

The Commission found, by clear and convincing evidence, that Respondent committed sanctionable conduct in violation of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct, all as follows. For organizational purposes, the Commission's findings correspond to the five categories of conduct outlined in the Charges and include, at the beginning of each category, the Rules violated by the conduct found to have occurred in each category. Some categories involved multiple Rule violations. Some Rules were violated by multiple categories of conduct. Some categories of conduct overlapped with others in terms of when, in time, they occurred. Ultimately, the Commission’s focus is not on the categories themselves, but the Rules implicated by Respondent’s conduct.

Maryland’s Orphans Courts are established by Article IV, Section 1, of Maryland’s Constitution. Md. Const. art. IV, § Art IV, 1. (“The Judicial power of this State is vested in . . . Orphans’ Courts.”). Orphans’ Courts are Maryland’s probate courts, empowered to “[d]irect the conduct of a personal representative[,]” and issue orders “required in the course of the administration of an estate[,]” or “necessary to determine the value or sources of payment of an elective share,” among other powers. Md. Code Ann., Est. & Trusts (“ET”) § 2-102. The Orphans’ Courts also have jurisdiction over some guardianships and protective proceedings. ET § 13-105.

“Orphans’ Court judges are responsible for approving administration accounts, making sure that only appropriate payments are made from estate assets and that distributions are made to the proper beneficiaries or heirs. Generally, payment of attorney’s fees or personal representative’s commissions made from estate assets must be approved by the Orphans’ Court.”<sup>5</sup>

With exceptions not relevant here,<sup>6</sup> each Orphans’ Court has three judges. Orphans’ Court judges run for general election every four years. Maryland’s Constitution requires that Orphans’ Court judges be Maryland citizens and residents of their jurisdiction for at least twelve months before their election. In Baltimore City, Baltimore

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<sup>5</sup> “Orphans’ Court,” Maryland Courts, <https://www.mdcourts.gov/orphancourt>, (accessed April 25, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> Harford, Howard, and Montgomery Counties have no separate Orphans’ Court judges, relying instead on circuit court judges to sit as Orphans’ Court judges. Maryland Code, Estates and Trusts Article, § 2-106.

County and Prince George's County, Orphans' Court judges must be admitted to the bar in Maryland. That is, they must be Maryland attorneys licensed to practice law in Maryland. In other counties that have a separate Orphans' Court (including Anne Arundel County), the judges need not be members of the bar in Maryland or otherwise licensed to practice law. Md. Const. art. IV, § 40.

In counties having a separate Orphans' Court, the number of judges needed to make a decision varies with whether the judges are required to be admitted to the Maryland bar. Where Orphans' Court judges are required to be admitted to the Maryland Bar to act alone (Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George's County), judges preside over cases alone and may make decisions alone. Elsewhere, Anne Arundel County, for one, judges sit in a panel to hear matters, and at least two judges are required for the Orphans' Court to "act." ET § 2-106(a)(3) ("Two judges shall have full power to do an act which the court is or may be authorized by law to perform, and two of them shall have power to hold court on a day not named in an adjournment, on the application of a person having pressing business in the court, if notice be given to any interested person, and the register records that notice has been given.").<sup>7</sup>

"Some estates proceed smoothly, and, other than seeing the Orphans' Court

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<sup>7</sup> Where two Orphans' Court judges are required to "act," but are absent, either because of a prolonged illness or vacancy, the remaining judge may "act" provided the absences are certified by the Register of Wills. ET § 2-106(a)(4). Here, there is no contention that the Register of Wills had certified such absences during the relevant time periods.

judge's signature on various estate documents, a personal representative and/or beneficiaries or heirs may have no direct contact with the Orphans' Court judges."<sup>8</sup>

“In other estates where disputes arise, Orphans' Court judges hold formal hearings on issues such as the validity of a particular Will or Codicil (which is an amendment to the original Will); proper beneficiaries or heirs and/or amounts to be distributed to them; who should be appointed personal representative; whether to remove a personal representative who has not properly carried out his or her duties; or what claims (and amounts) may be paid from the estate. Sometimes there are disputes concerning payments to be made to the personal representative or estate attorney.”<sup>9</sup>

“In formal hearings, the Orphans' Court judges – like any other trial court judges – must consider the evidence submitted (including testimony) and apply the appropriate Maryland laws in order to resolve the dispute.”<sup>10</sup>

Pursuant to Section 2-107 of Maryland's Estates and Trusts Article, the Governor of Maryland must designate and commission one of the Anne Arundel County's Orphans' Court judges to serve as Chief Judge. Once designated and commissioned, the Chief Judge has “full power and authority” to “act as chief judge.” ET § 2-107(a).

The Orphans' Court for Anne Arundel County is required to hold sessions on “at

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<sup>8</sup> Orphans' Court," Maryland Courts, <https://www.mdcourts.gov/orphanscourt>, (accessed April 25, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

least 2 full business days each week, and more often if necessary, for the transaction of business.” ET § 2-106(h); [IC 28]. Under Article 2 of the Anne Arundel County Code, those sessions must occur between 10:00am and 3:00pm on the designated days. Anne Arundel County Code, Art. 2, § 2-3-201. [IC 28].

**A. Improper Decorum, Interference with the Operations of the Orphans’ Court, and Undermining Public Confidence in the Judiciary**

**Maryland Rules 18-101.1 (Compliance with the Law); 18-101.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary); 18-101.3 (Avoiding Lending the Prestige of Judicial Office); 18-102.5 (Competence, Diligence, and Cooperation); 18-102.8 (Decorum, Demeanor, and Communication with Jurors); 18-102.12 (Supervisory Duties); 18-102.15 (Responding to Judicial and Attorney Misconduct); 18-102.16 (a) (Cooperation with Disciplinary Authorities)**

Respondent earned her bachelor’s degree from Sarah Lawrence College. She graduated from North Carolina Central University School of Law, and earned an LLM from the Washington College of Law at American University. Respondent was admitted to practice law in Pennsylvania in 1992 and the District of Columbia in 1995.<sup>11</sup>

Respondent was first elected to the Orphans’ Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County in November of 2018 and sworn in on December 3, 2018.

In September of 2021, Respondent entered into a Conditional Diversion Agreement with the Commission based in part on the Commission’s determination that Respondent may have committed sanctionable conduct when she failed to perform

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<sup>11</sup> ”Anne Arundel County, Maryland Orphans' Court," Maryland Manual On-Line, <https://www.msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual>, (accessed April 25, 2026).

judicial duties;<sup>12</sup> failed to timely file tax returns and pay outstanding tax obligations; endorsed a politician and business on her personal social media page which also had a cover photo supporting the judge's campaign for Orphans' Court; advocated for political and legal issues on her social media page; used court resources to apply for a political position; attempted to sell jewelry and insurance to court personnel; failed to timely file Financial Disclosure Statements for 2018 and 2019; and failed to cooperate when she displayed a lack of candor in responses to Investigative Counsel, submitted through her counsel. Respondent successfully completed the terms of the Conditional Diversion Agreement in September of 2022.

Two months after completing the Conditional Diversion Agreement, Respondent was re-elected in November 2022, along with the successful initial elections of Judge David Duba, and Judge Marc Knapp to the Orphans' Court. Judge Knapp was admitted to practice law in Maryland in 2014. Judge Duba was a high school teacher and had not attended law school.

After initially serving as Interim Chief Judge after the 2022 election, Respondent was designated Chief Judge by the Governor of Maryland in the summer of 2023. [Tr., pp. 239-240].

Approximately three months after completing the Conditional Diversion

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<sup>12</sup> In the current matter, Eunice Owens, Court Administrator, testified Respondent had been consistently absent during COVID; Karen Recinos stated Respondent misses work sometimes and "did not show up for work for 15 months." [TESTIMONY OF EUNICE OWENS, Tr., pp. 92-93]. [TESTIMONY OF KAREN RECINOS, Tr., p. 81].

Agreement, while functioning as the Interim Chief Judge, Respondent failed to require that Judge Duba work during the Orphans' Court's mandated business hours of 10am to 3pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Specifically, at the time he was elected to the Orphans' Court, Judge Duba was a full-time teacher at Prince George's County's Bowie High School with working hours there from 7:15am to 2:45pm. Judge Duba was initially absent for the majority of court sessions unless he used leave from his teaching job. According to Judge Duba, "we arranged for my time at the court to be spent in the afternoons" from 3:00pm to 5:00pm from December 2022 to May 2023. Respondent, as Chief Judge, approved the schedule changes to accommodate Judge Duba's teaching obligations. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE DAVID DUBA, Tr., pp. 164-167] [TESTIMONY OF CHIEF JUDGE GIPSON, December 5, 2025 Tr., pp. 80-81].

Initially, Chief Judge Gipson addressed Judge Duba's absence by influencing the second judge, Judge Knapp, to agree with her. Respondent told Judge Knapp she had been on the court before, had a wealth of experience, and was better able to evaluate things. Judge Knapp felt "sort of intimidated" by Respondent and, at times, "kicked himself" for signing some of Chief Judge Gipson's decisions. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr. p. 203].

As Judge Knapp gained experience, and he began to disagree with the wording of some of Chief Judge Gipson's decisions, she engaged in loud arguments with him in Chambers, so much so that others in the building could hear it. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., p. 204]. Court staff noted loud and heated arguments between the

Respondent and Judge Knapp that were audible to employees of the Office of the Register of Wills while they were assisting members of the public. Lauren Heath, Front Desk Supervisor for the Office of the Register of Wills, found the loud arguments uncomfortable, particularly when there's "yelling and screaming" while staff is talking to people who are grieving and dealing with serious situations. [TESTIMONY OF LAUREN HEATH, Tr., p. 178]. Deborah Cheek, Auditor and Assistant Court Administrator for the Orphans' Court, and whose desk was outside of chambers, heard Respondent arguing with Judge Knapp. According to Ms. Cheek, the arguments interrupted everyone's work and caused her coworkers to question their safety. [TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH CHEEK, Tr., p. 150]. Respondent acknowledged that she and Judge Knapp would get into loud disagreements sometimes. [TESTIMONY OF CHIEF JUDGE VICKIE GIPSON, December 5, 2025 Tr., 82].

Respondent's conduct related to her disputes with Judge Knapp extended beyond chambers and into public view. The atmosphere in the courtroom was often tense when the Respondent and Judge Knapp were on the bench. Eunice Owens and Deborah Cheek were present in the courtroom during hearings with the judges. To Ms. Owens, the disagreements between the Respondent and Judge Knapp were rude. They would cut each other off and have at least one contentious hearing a day. [TESTIMONY OF EUNICE OWENS, Tr., pp. 97-99]. On one occasion, Ms. Cheek believed that an attorney appearing before the court was "going to have a heart attack the way he reacted to something that Respondent had said" because "it gets crazy at times." [TESTIMONY

OF DEBORAH CHEEK, Tr., p. 145]. Members of the public or litigants asked Ms. Owens if the Respondent and Judge Knapp were “real judges.” [TESTIMONY OF EUNICE OWENS, Tr., pp. 99-100].

Chief Judge Gipson accommodated Judge Duba to the detriment of the court and the public. From December 27, 2022 to June 13, 2023, the Orphans’ Court was in session fifty-two times. Judge Duba was absent from thirty-six sessions and arrived at 3:00 pm or later for four sessions. [IC 27].<sup>13</sup> After May of 2023, when school was in session, Respondent approved Judge Duba’s tardiness to court as he regularly arrived around 11:00am. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE DAVID DUBA, Tr., pp. 166, 167, 170] [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., p. 198]. Ms. Cheek explained that Judge Duba “was supposed to be there the regular hours that the court works. We used to schedule hearings at 9:30, definitely start at 10:00 at least for hearings. When Judge Duba was elected, we were told not to schedule 9:30 and 10:00 hearings. We needed to start at 11:00 because of his other work schedule.” The inability to hold earlier hearings backed the court up and delayed the scheduling of cases. [TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH CHEEK, Tr., pp. 157].

Judge Duba’s late arrival and the need to start hearings at 11:00 am instead of 9:30 am or 10:00 am delayed the scheduling of cases. Ms. Cheek explained:

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<sup>13</sup> The Orphans’ Court maintained Minutes of court sessions. The Minutes noted when a judge was absent, but did not routinely note when a judge arrived late. [TESTIMONY OF EUNICE OWENS, Tr., pp. 92-93]. Investigative Counsel’s Exhibit 27 were the Minutes from December 6, 2022 through December 19, 2024.

[INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL]: And what impact, if any, did this late arrival and the changing of the court sessions have on the court?

[MS. CHEEK]: Well, that would be two less hearings a day that we were able to hold – one at 9:30 and one at 10:00. So it backed us up a bit.

[INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL]: Okay. How would you describe the backup?

[MS. CHEEK]: I don't think we've ever caught up. We were scheduling three or four months out.

[TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH CHEEK, Tr., pp. 158].

Respondent's unwillingness to correct Judge Duba's lateness, and her disputes with Judge Knapp, together led to further scheduling delays for litigants at the Orphans' Court. Respondent admitted that she "shifted the show causes and contempts from the afternoon to the morning" when just she and Judge Knapp were present, setting "more complicated matters" before the three judges after 11:00 or 11:15am. [Tr., pp. 286-289]. She did so because of what she described was Judge Knapp's "escalating behavior, and also because it's a three-judge panel, and there was no reason why [the litigants] couldn't wait because the court was already in session. It was in session, just people were not before us at that time, but they were in the building handling their business according to the court." [Tr., pp. 291-292]." Although the court only needed two judges to conduct business, Respondent determined "the further along we're getting into that process, the more I have to know what Judge Knapp is doing." [Tr., p. 289]. Respondent put more reliance on Judge Duba's ability to evaluate things than Judge Knapp. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., pp. 198-202].

Respondent did not take measures to correct Judge Duba's conduct or otherwise report his failure to fulfill his judicial duties. Instead, to Investigative Counsel, Respondent attempted to justify her failures by suggesting that she had the authority to decide whether Judge Duba was tardy. Specifically, Respondent said, "I believe that it is within my administrative authority to decide if someone is tardy or not and I have not determined Judge Duba to be tardy." [IC20, JVG000196]. Respondent also attempted to justify the late start time she mandated for the Orphans' Court. Of this, Respondent said ". . . it's perfectly within the authority of the administrative judge to set their docket, set the docket for the court and judges do it all the time" [Tr., p. 290].

Respondent further exceeded her administrative authority by changing the decisions of Judge Knapp and Judge Duba in matters on which she did not preside. Judge Knapp recalled Judge Duba giving a decision to Respondent in a case where she did not sit and "she didn't like it. And so she changed it. Not simply making some, you know, stylistic changes as was her want – she changed the bottom line of the thing. And then she and Judge Duba signed it... And she never listened to the recording of the hearing. She did nothing about it. She just didn't like what we decided." [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., p. 216].

Respondent attempted to justify having changed orders or opinions arising out of matters on which she had not presided first by saying that she was merely correcting her colleagues' "big mistakes." [Tr., pp. 255-256]. Respondent then denied changing ". . . the decision in order of the court" if it was "just Judge Knapp and Judge Duba sitting on

the court.” [Tr., pp 257]. Respondent then admitted that “I wouldn’t say that I changed it unless I found something that was inconsistent.” [Tr., p. 257]. And then Respondent further admitted:

“there were a couple of times when I was out of the office that they made some decisions that were just kind of left field, and that's when I said, well, maybe I need to see when I'm out what you all are doing, because you're interpreting -- your interpretation of what the law requires is a little not where it should be. And I didn't have anything to do with trying to change how they decided. It had to do with how, what the basis of what they were doing and whether or not that was something that was a correct interpretation of the law.” [Tr., p. 259].

A judge, when acting in a judicial capacity as a trial judge with “his [or her] finger on the pulse of the trial[,]” *State v. Hawkins*, 326 Md. 270, 278, 604 A.2d 489, 493 (1992), will usually have discretion to preside over a trial and make judicial decisions that affect the rights of the parties in that trial. When acting as an Administrative Judge, largely, a judge has the power to make administrative decisions that focus on the administration of the court, but would not, in general, be empowered to unilaterally divest other judges of the court of their inherent authority to rule on issues affecting the rights and interests of litigants in a specific case. *St. Joseph Med. Ctr., Inc. v. Turnbull*, 432 Md. 259, 277 (2013). By changing her colleagues’ decisions, Respondent exceeded her authority as Chief Judge of the Orphans’ Court for Anne Arundel County.

Respondent also eliminated Judge Knapp’s ability to file written dissents. In the fall of 2023, following a case heard by the three-judge panel, and on which Respondent

and Judge Duba agreed regarding the decision, Judge Knapp indicated he would file a dissent. Judge Knapp explained:

“And so I told Judge Gipson, Judge Duba, that I wanted to write a dissent. I said that I absolutely didn't agree with what they did. I thought it was wrong. I thought it was important that the dissent go out to those individuals who would be impacted by the decision. And so Judge Gipson said she was going to write the opinion. And she took about, I don't know, three or four weeks to get this written. And I kept hassling her, you know, let's do it. And ultimately what she did was one day she just dropped on my desk on her way out a document. She said, here's the opinion. And I could tell it was printed -- usually when these things were printed we would send stuff over to the clerks and they would print it. And it would come out with a different font than was used when we printed stuff. So I could tell this was something that was just printed on our printer. And I had no reason to suspect anything. But for whatever reason I walked into the clerk's office on my way out. And there on the corner of the desk over there was another copy of this thing. And I looked and it had been signed by Judges Gipson and Duba. So she was trying to get this thing sent out before I could provide the dissent. You know, at that time I had a pretty good idea of where she was going with this thing. So I was able to finalize my dissent in a couple of minutes. I grabbed the signed document so the clerks couldn't send it out. Finished my dissent. Gave it to the clerks. So the dissent and the opinion went out.” [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., pp. 205-206].

Approximately a week after the majority opinion and Judge Knapp's dissent went out, Respondent issued what Judge Knapp called a “dicta,” in which she said that there would be no more opinions issued by the court, only orders. Respondent told Judge Knapp he could not dissent to orders as he did with opinions. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., p. 206]. On November 7, 2023, Respondent sent an email to her fellow Judges and staff stating:

“Please obtain my approval of all proceeding notes, decisions and orders generated by the Judges before being sent to Eunice or Debbie for printing,

and dissemination for signature. Please do not record a document on the public record without my consent, which may be conveyed verbally or in writing to the Register of Wills staff.” [IC20, JVG001128].

Judge Knapp replied to Respondent’s email the same day stating, "except if it's a dissent or concurring opinion that Judge Gipson won't sign." He expressed concerns over Respondent’s approval being required given all three judges had “equal authority when it comes to things judicial.” [IC20, JVG001128]. Per Judge Knapp, Respondent “felt she had the authority to change anything that I did. Which essentially would have degraded me from being a co-equal, a judge.” [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., p. 218].

Subsequent to Respondent’s November 7, 2023 email, Judge Knapp drafted a Memorandum of Dissent in Estate #105908 following a hearing that took place on February 14, 2024 and a second Memorandum of Dissent after an April 2, 2024 hearing in Estate #89805. [IC29][TESTIMONY OF JUDGE MARC KNAPP, Tr., pp. 210-211]. Judge Knapp provided these dissents to Respondent and Judge Duba. Judge Knapp wished that his dissents “had gone out to the parties involved.” [Tr. p. 212]. He did not know whether they had “wound up on the court record.” [Tr., p. 211].

Before the Commission, Respondent attempted to justify her decision to disallow the filing of Judge Knapp’s dissents. She said “. . . it was another form of passive-aggressive way to usurp my authority as chief judge.” [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE VICKIE GIPSON, December 5, 2025 Tr., p. 77-78] [IC34]. Respondent also said she consulted three lawyer-judge Orphans’ Courts (Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Prince George’s County) to determine whether her court would veer from the prior practice of

issuing decisions, to mainly issue orders as Respondent “never heard of someone dissenting an order before.” [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE VICKIE GIPSON, December 5, 2025, Tr., pp. 73, 141-142].<sup>14</sup> Respondent admitted to taking actions intended to limit Judge Knapp’s ability to meaningfully participate as a member of the court, including not accepting dissents, limiting filings without Respondent’s approval, and ensuring she did not sit alone with Judge Knapp on substantive contested cases. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE VICKIE GIPSON, December 5, 2025 Tr., pp. 77-78, 80] [IC34].

In April 2024, Chief Judge Gipson escalated her attempts to limit Judge Knapp’s ability to dissent. Ultimately, she sought that he be immediately suspended and removed from office, that he be judicially barred from an entrance to the Orphans’ Court and from attending judiciary events and trainings, and that he be criminally prosecuted.

On April 18, 2024, at 12:25 pm, after a hearing, Respondent threatened “further action” without “additional warning” if her judicial colleagues engaged in “contentious disagreement” in court. Chief Judge Gipson emailed Judge Knapp, Judge Duba, and others:

“Court Guideline - How Disagreements, Discord or Misunderstanding Among the Judges are to be Handled in Open Court.” Respondent’s email stated, “contentious

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<sup>14</sup> Why Respondent was consulting the Orphans’ Courts in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George’s County about the filing of dissents in Anne Arundel County is not entirely clear. In those other jurisdictions, unlike Anne Arundel County, one judge, who is an attorney-at-law, is permitted to “act[,]” ET § 2-106. But one judge, empowered to act, would not dissent from his or her own decision. Accordingly, what happens in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George’s County would not necessarily be material to what happens in Anne Arundel County. For this reason, the Commission did not credit Respondent’s attempted justification.

disagreement with other members of the judicial panel shall be avoided in open court. In the event there is a concern, the judge with the concern should request a brief recess so that the concern may be discussed openly in the judges' chambers with the other judges on the panel outside of the view of the public and off the record. As the Chief Judge of the Orphans' Court for Anne Arundel County, I am the administrative head judge and as such am responsible for the smooth running of court operations. Therefore, although I am not 'the boss' of the other elected judges, I do have supervisory authority that must be followed. Failure to follow this court issued guideline will result in further action. There will be no additional warnings in this regard." [IC20, JVG001142].

A little more than a half hour later, at 1:07 pm on April 18, 2024, Respondent took further action against Judge Knapp. Specifically, Respondent lodged her first complaint with the Commission against Judge Knapp. She alleged that Judge Knapp "admonished the Chief Judge" after a "disagreement/misunderstanding" during a hearing that day. Referring to her earlier threat as "guidance," Chief Judge Gipson alleged that Judge Knapp had responded to it inappropriately. [IC3, JVG000066-68].

On April 23, 2024, at 1:08 pm, Respondent sent an email to Judge Knapp requesting decorum and refraining from cursing or berating other judges for not having legal training. [IC20, JVG000083]. Less than an hour later, at 1:50 pm on April 23, 2024, Respondent filed a second complaint against Judge Knapp, proclaiming that "immediate intervention" was needed. She alleged that Judge Knapp and Judge Duba disagreed over proposed changes to an Order, among other allegations. [IC3, JVG000073].

On April 25, 2024, at 11:32am, Judge Knapp responded to Respondent's April 23 email requesting decorum, etc. with "how about for generally acting like assholes?" [IC20, JVG000083]. About an hour later, at 12:36 pm, in an email attempting to file a

third complaint against Judge Knapp, Respondent told the Commission that security had asked to sit in chambers. Specifically, Respondent said “security has asked to sit in chambers with the judges to discourage inappropriate outbursts or other hostile behavior. Hopefully, that will serve as a deterrent to someone getting hurt.”

Less than three hours later, on April 25, 2024 at 3:01pm, Respondent sent another email to Investigative Counsel, requesting that her complaint against Judge Knapp be “escalated as soon as possible.” She alleged that the security guard and “another person” thought Judge Knapp might be inebriated. She added “I do not feel safe and would like to request that this complaint be escalated as soon as possible.” [IC20, JVG000082].

Documentary evidence before the Commission established that on April 25, 2024, a security guard was posted in chambers. But the security guard’s Documentation Report, written the next day, did not mention that Judge Knapp was inebriated. Security Officer Cody Henson wrote:

“On Thursday April 25<sup>th</sup> S/O Henson *posted in the Judges chamber* during court hearings while Judges were discussing court hearing I observed Judge Knapp walk over towards Judge Gipson with an irate tone pointing his hands at her Judge Gipson asked Judge Knapp three times to remove himself from her space as he was about one foot away from her in a reaching distance. I begin to walk towards them while using words of profanity Judge Knapp then says to Judge Gipson why don’t I go out there and get the security guard. I then said I’m right here sir Judge Knapp then said if I harm you the security guard can shoot me there were a few more words shared then Judge Knapp said that he’s going in the courtroom.” [IC20, JVG0000086]. (emphasis added).

Before the Commission, Respondent admitted that she was the one that had asked that security be posted in chambers but otherwise attempted to minimize her decision.

First, Respondent said that her request for security in chambers was not for her. Then she said that security was not in chambers but near chambers for everybody. Respondent said, “I asked for security officers in chambers not because I wanted security in chambers for me but I wanted security near chambers, because they really weren’t in chambers, but near chambers for everybody.” [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE GIPSON, December 5, 2025 Tr., p. 238].

On April 26, 2024, at 7:21 am, Investigative Counsel acknowledged having received the “supplemental materials and information” Respondent had provided the previous day. Investigative Counsel reminded Respondent that investigations must be conducted pursuant to rules, adding that if Respondent believed that she, her colleagues, or staff were in “immediate danger,” Respondent “should consider” various steps that Investigative Counsel then listed. “Commission investigations into allegations raised in a complaint must be conducted according to the Rules. An investigation may not result in an immediate action addressing the alleged safety concerns that you raise. If you believe that you, your colleagues, and/or your staff are in immediate danger you should consider (1) contacting law enforcement, (2) contacting the Judicial Threat Management Center of the Maryland Judiciary . . . , and/or (3) filing the appropriate petition with the Court.” [IC 20, JVG000082; R1].

Later that day, Respondent disclosed to the Anne Arundel County Sheriff Everett Sesker that she had complained to the Commission about Judge Knapp. Specifically, on April 26, 2024 at 11:25am, Respondent emailed a copy of Security Officer Henson’s

Documentation Report to Investigative Counsel and copied Sheriff Sesker on the email. [IC20, JVG000084]. Shortly thereafter on April 26, Respondent asked Investigative Counsel the type of petition and where it should be filed, to which Investigative Counsel replied the “Commission cannot provide legal advice or suggestions as to legal process.” [IC20, JVG000090]. Also on April 26, Respondent emailed Judicial Threat Management, copying Investigative Counsel and Sheriff Sesker, forwarding Office Henson’s incident report bringing her “concerns personally and as the Chief Judge of the Orphans’ Court for Anne Arundel County.” [IC20, JVG000093]. On April 26, Investigative Counsel sent correspondence to Judge Gipson acknowledging receipt of her first two complaints against Judge Knapp and notification that the investigations are confidential. [IC4].

A few days later, on April 29, 2024, Respondent wrote again to the Judicial Threat Management Center, copying Investigative Counsel and Sheriff Sesker, with the subject line of the email: “URGENT REQUEST FOR IMMEDIATE SUSPENSION OF JUDGE KNAPP DURING INVESTIGATION.” In this email, Respondent also attempted to leverage the safety of the public at large whom she stated “might be at risk of harm.” [IC20, JVG000097]. Sheriff Sesker wrote to Respondent on April 29 “advising [her] to continue [her] conversations with Mr. Cliff Hisker at the Maryland Judiciary Threat Management Center” and instructing her that security at the courthouse had “full arrest powers and are more than capable of handling the incidents you described to me.” [IC20, JVG000106]. Mr. Hisker wrote to Respondent on April 29 advising her he had

forwarded her request to Warren Hedges, Fair Practices Officer with the Maryland Judiciary; Mr. Hedges wrote to Respondent on April 30, 2024 to advise her that the Administrative Office of the Courts did not have the power to “intervene in personnel matters in the Orphans’ Court and doesn’t have the power to suspend a sitting Orphans’ Court judge,” suggesting she contact the local sheriff and the Commission. [IC20, JVG000113-115].

Respondent sent an email to Investigative Counsel on April 30, 2024 that Judge Knapp was failing to perform judicial duties as he refused, without explanation, Respondent’s request that he draft an Order. [IC20, JVG000116]. Respondent and Judge Knapp had a disagreement on April 30 regarding the presence of security in chambers. The Watkins Security Agency’s Documentation form completed by Corporal Edwards regarding the incident indicated the officer was “*assigned to a detail inside the Judges chamber.*” [IC20, JVG000127]. (emphasis added).

On May 1, Respondent emailed Mr. Hedges, copying the Commission, Judicial Threat Management Center, and Sheriff Sesker, asking that Mr. Hedges “reconsider your decision or refer my original question to a different legal officer for further review” because, in her view, “[i]f we were – merely – dealing with a personnel matter, I believe Judge Knapp would have been immediately removed, either by suspension or termination.” [IC20, JVG000117]. Nineteen minutes later, Respondent emailed the Commission and the Judicial Threat Management Center, writing, “I would like to request Judge Knapp’s immediate removal from his position as an Associate Judge of the

Anne Arundel County Orphans' Court" because "due to staffing concerns with the security company it may not be able to continue coverage in chambers." [IC20, JVG000121]. Also on May 1, Respondent emailed Investigative Counsel that Judge Knapp contacted the County Executive stating his displeasure that the County Executive was not doing more to oust the former Register of Wills due to her legal challenges. [IC20, JVG000122].

Respondent wrote to Sean Wolcoff, the Judiciary's Security Director, copying the Judicial Threat Management Center, the Commission, and Sheriff Sesker at 9:45 am on May 2, 2024, asking, in part, for "coordinated attention" to her concerns regarding Judge Knapp and identification of the entity responsible for funding the security presence she wanted in chambers. [IC20, JVG000123]. At 1:02 pm, Respondent forwarded to the Commission, copying Judicial Threat Management and Sheriff Sesker, an April 30, 2024 Watkins Security incident report which referenced "the back and forth" between Respondent and Judge Knapp over the presence of security in chambers. [IC20, JVG000125-127]. At 2:19 pm, Warren Hedges replied to Respondent's May 1 email, "[p]lease understand that the AOC does not have legal authority to suspend any individuals in the Orphans' Court... Regarding security concerns, I believe the email from Sheriff Sesker on April 29 does a better job than I can to cover resources available for you." [IC20, JVG000128]. Shortly thereafter, Respondent returned to emailing the Commission, Judicial Threat Management, and Sheriff Sesker at 2:34 pm describing incidents involving Judge Knapp, Respondent, and Officer Henson. [IC20, JVG000132].

She wrote again at 2:39 pm to the Commission and Judicial Threat Management describing another incident in which Judge Knapp accused an employee of “stealing a bottle of water.” [IC20, JVG000133]. Still on May 2, at 4:53pm, Respondent, copied the Commission, Sheriff Sesker, and other judiciary personnel, on her reply to Mr. Hisker’s notification that the Register of Wills controls access to her court so he did not have standing to address her “request to restrict Judge Knapp’s rear access to the Orphans’ Court.” Respondent deemed Mr. Hisker’s response “very disturbing” and alleged “there does not appear to be any accountability on the part of the judiciary to secure Orphans’ Courts from perceived internal or external threats.” [IC20, JVG000134-135].

Respondent continued her repeated emails to the Judicial Threat Management Center and the Commission on May 3, 2024. At 1:22 pm, she wrote to complain that the “suggestions that are being made [such as to attend mediation with Judge Knapp] do not appear to fully consider the urgency of this situation and the real chance that myself and staff are at risk of harm”, and to ask, “Is this how it would be handled if I was a Circuit or District Court Judge? I don’t believe so.” In the email, she described Judge Knapp as “someone who may have a mental disability.” [IC20, JVG000136]. At 1:44pm, Respondent wrote to Sheriff Sesker copying Judicial Threat Management, the Commission, the former Register of Wills, Tameka Smith, and others, stating that she believed Sheriff Sesker was mistaken in stating security present at the Orphans’ Court had arrest powers and requesting a meeting between herself, the Sheriff’s Office, the Register of Wills, and the Judicial Threat Management Center “to look at establishing an

appropriate level of security support.” [IC20, JVG000138].

Also on May 3, 2024, Detective Daniel Rodriguez, with the Anne Arundel County Police Department’s Homeland Security and Intelligence Unit, contacted Respondent after receiving a report from the Judicial Threat Management Center of ongoing conflict and possible threats at the Orphans’ Court. During the conversation, Respondent described an ongoing conflict with Judge Knapp, primarily focusing on the incident in which Judge Knapp made a statement suggesting a security guard could shoot him. Respondent also stated she had reported Judge Knapp to the Commission and over the coming days forwarded numerous communications between herself, the Commission, and others to Det. Rodriguez. [TESTIMONY OF DETECTIVE DANIEL RODRIGUEZ, Tr., pp. 183-189; IC 18, JVG000831-859]. Det. Rodriguez did not consider the incident a threat and his unit determined that Respondent’s complaint “was not indicative of threat management and that it was more of an employee conflict resolution matter” that did not warrant further investigation. [TESTIMONY OF DETECTIVE DANIEL RODRIGUEZ, Tr., pp. 190-191]. On May 7, 2024, Respondent sent an email to the Commission, Judicial Threat Management, and Det. Rodriguez “regarding the May 2, 2024 incident previously reported.” [IC20, JVG000150].

Prior to beginning her docket on May 16, 2024, Respondent renewed her efforts to limit Judge Knapp’s access to the court. At 8:13 am on May 16, Respondent sent an email with the subject line “URGENT -Request for rear building access limitation of Judge Knapp due to security concerns” to Sheriff Sesker, copying the Commission, Mr.

Hisker, Det. Rodriguez, Ms. Smith, Ms. Owens and the former Register of Wills. In this email, Respondent stated, “I learned that your office is the point of control for rear building access. Due to ongoing security concerns, I would like to request that Judge Marc Knapp’s access to the entrance on the rear of the building be removed immediately.” Respondent stated she was making the request as the “change in access will require him to go through the metal detector on the first floor which is monitored by security officers.” The only justification provided for the request was that “Judge Knapp’s behavior, in my opinion, has been escalating, this is an urgent request.” [IC20, JVG000152]. She did not request that all three judges be required to go through security, only Judge Knapp.

Seemingly dissatisfied with the responses she was receiving on May 16, Respondent called the police about Judge Knapp after he opted to work in the courtroom between hearings rather than in chambers. Subsequent to Respondent’s May 16 email to Sheriff Sesker and others, Judge Knapp left the chambers area to work in the courtroom as he objected to the presence of security personnel in chambers. [Tr., p. 262]. In a January 2025 affidavit to the Commission, Respondent represented that she called the police because Judge Knapp “refused to leave the courtroom before the litigants arrived” for a hearing and was “talking to a lawyer” present in the courtroom. “I knew I needed help to get him to understand that he could not be alone in the courtroom with litigants having conversations with them, *ex parte*.” Respondent also maintained that she called police because she was “concerned about safety.” [IC30, JVG000920-921].

When later questioned at a deposition about her May 16 call to the police, Respondent offered a different justification. She said that Judge Knapp “shouldn’t be saying anything to a litigant in a case,” “had his coat all up on the back of his chair... was really unprofessional... [i]t just looked terrible,” and he wouldn’t come out of the courtroom. She further stated, “I knew that we were going to have members of the public come in. And the minute you see that kind of dissension, it’s already a high anxiety type hearing that we have. And it would have created problems if he had started talking negatively. Plus, he just wasn’t supposed to have those communications. So at that point, that was when I was like, well, he’s not removing himself because I’m asking him to do it or he’s being asked to do it, even by the security there at the facility. So the only thing left that I could do was call the police. I was told that if I felt something was unsafe or inappropriate, that I should call the police, so that’s what I did.” [Tr., pp. 261-64]. Even if Judge Knapp’s anticipated conduct of speaking to the public prior to a hearing was inappropriate, it was not criminal.

On May 16, 2024, the day police were called, Karen Recinos, Deputy for Anne Arundel County Register of Wills, heard the Respondent and Judge Knapp arguing while Ms. Recinos was assisting members of the public at her desk in the Register of Wills office. [TESTIMONY OF KAREN RECINOS, Tr., pp. 76-77]. When the police arrived, they entered through the offices of the Register of Wills, where staff assist members of the public with official business. [IC19A].

The responding officers were Officer Brenden King and Officer Cross of the Anne

Arundel County Police Department. Both wore and used body worn cameras on arriving. Officer King described the call as a “disorderly conduct between two judges.”

To Officer King, Respondent confirmed that she “hadn’t been physically assaulted or anything, that [Judge Knapp] was just pointing at her with his finger and just yelling.” [TESTIMONY OF OFFICER BRENDEN KING, Tr., pp. 115-117]. Respondent told Officer King that she “was arguing with a Judge Marc Knapp, that they were becoming more aggressive and yelling at each other.” Judge Knapp had removed himself to the courtroom prior to Officer King’s arrival. Respondent added that “I’m the one who determines what’s supposed to happen from a business flow standpoint” and that Judge Knapp “does not want to recognize my authority.” [IC19A; Tr., p. 138].

Officer King was directed by his superior to remain at the courthouse for the remainder of the day, advised both judges that they could file for a peace order if necessary. No criminal charges were filed by the police on May 16. [TESTIMONY OF OFFICER BRENDEN KING, Tr., pp. 133-34; IC19A].

On May 19, 2024, Respondent filed a petition for a Peace Order seeking protection from Judge Knapp. [IC5]. Respondent also completed an Application for Statement of Charges against Judge Knapp on May 19, in the District Court for Anne Arundel County. [IC11, JVG001157-1160]. Despite her previous assertions regarding safety, Respondent did not allege Judge Knapp was ever physically violent or overtly threatened her with physical violence and did not allege threats of violence or physical touching in her petitions for peace order or application for statement of charges. [IC7,

117-118; IC5, IC12, IC11]. The Temporary Peace Order was granted on May 21, 2024 after an ex parte hearing, and a Final Peace Order hearing was scheduled for June 3, 2024. [IC5; IC7]. During the May 21, 2024, hearing, Respondent repeatedly described the tension and hostility between herself and Judge Knapp, including an extensive discussion of the function of the Orphans' Court during cross examination; made negative inferences regarding the Judiciary and Commission; and disclosed that she and others had filed complaints with the Commission. She also claimed that she had been advised by the Commission to file for a peace order, later describing the filing as "what I was told to do, not what I want to do." [IC7, JVG000294-297, 301].

The Peace Order proceedings and the Application for Statement of Charges received media coverage, including an article by Royale Bonds published in the Baltimore Banner, which appeared on May 21, 2024. [IC25]. Also on May 21, 2024, Respondent emailed Mr. Hisker, the Commission, Sheriff Sesker, Det. Rodriguez, Ms. Owens, Ms. Smith, the former Register of Wills, and others attaching a copy of the temporary peace order and stating:

"Please see the attached temporary peace order was granted [sic] due to the abusive harassment of Chief Judge Gipson by Associate Judge Marc Knapp. This temporary order is good through June 2, 2023 [sic] and states in relevant part the following:

**"NO IN PERSON CONTACT BETWEEN THE PETITIONER AND RESPONDENT SHALL OCCUR WITHOUT THIRD PARTIES PRESENT WHICH MAY INCLUDE FACILITY SECURITY."**

Accordingly, I would like to request that the security presence at the Commerce Park location be continued in both, the courtroom and chambers pending a determination regarding whether the temporary order will become final.

The criminal stalking charges are still pending and if picked-up, the criminal matter will be litigated by the States' Attorney Office.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this request and to addressing the related security concerns in the Anne Arundel County Orphans' Court." [IC20, JVG000159].

The former Register of Wills denied Respondent's request to have security present in chambers. [IC20, JVG000162].

On May 24, 2024, Investigative Counsel acknowledged receipt of Respondent's third complaint against Judge Knapp. [IC4]. On May 30, 2024, Investigative Counsel notified Respondent and offered her the opportunity to respond to complaints against her filed by Complainants in CJD 2024-051, 053, and 054 on or before July 1, 2024.

The final hearing on the Peace Order petition was postponed on June 3, and 24, 2024; the Temporary Peace Order remained in effect during the period of postponement.

On July 9, 2024, Investigative Counsel advised Respondent she did not respond to the three complaints by the July 1 deadline, but, as a courtesy, gave Respondent an extension until July 19, 2024.

The Peace Order petition was dismissed on July 16, 2024 after the presiding court determined that the case had expired. [IC5, JVG000282-283; IC11]. Respondent subsequently filed a second petition for a Peace Order on July 17, 2024 alleging

harassment and stalking by Judge Knapp. [IC12]. Respondent testified at a hearing on July 17, 2024 – again identifying herself as “Chief Judge” and Judge Knapp as “Associate Judge” – in the District Court for Anne Arundel County in Case No. D-07-CV-24-819920. [IC14, JVG000498]. During her testimony, Respondent stated, “the problem is, is that there’s a lack of clarity in terms of who has oversight authority over the Orphans’ Court that’s allowing him to get away with this type of behavior . . . I think he’s being allowed to get away with it under the auspices of the people of Anne Arundel County need their representation.” [IC14, JVG000523]. She claimed she was:

“advised by Judicial Disabilities, the sheriff, the police, that if I wanted to have – the ultimate protection would be the peace order process. I don’t feel that if I was in a typical human resources oversight environment, that it would have escalated to that point because I think he would have been removed from his position based on his behavior much earlier. I think that there’s just a gap in the laws and how that they’re being interpreted that’s allowing this. So we’ve done absolutely everything, from my perspective that we can do, and I feel like I’ve been placed in a – in a – in a horrific position of having to bring – air our dirty laundry in public. I even went to – to – to the Judicial Threats Office. Same thing. Everybody has input, but nobody has any authority, supposedly, wherein I believe the Judicial Disabilities does have the authority to temporarily remove him and they choose not to.” [IC14, JVG000524-525].

A temporary peace order was granted. [IC12; IC14, JVG000529].

Also on July 17, 2024, Investigative Counsel notified Respondent of another complaint (CJD 2024-069) and offered her the opportunity to respond on or before August 19, 2024. After receiving emails from Respondent on July 19 and 22, 2024 in

this matter, Investigative Counsel requested an additional response from Respondent relating to administration and oversight of court operations in violation of governing laws relating to Judge Duba. On October 10, 2024, Investigative Counsel notified Respondent and offered her the opportunity to respond to a fifth complaint (CJD 2024-109), filed by the same Complainant in CJD 2024-069, on or before November 8, 2024. [IC2].

Following a Final Peace Order hearing in the District Court for Anne Arundel County, the second petition was denied on August 6, 2024. The court determined Respondent could not meet the required burden of proof. [IC12; IC14].

Employees of the Orphans' Court and Register of Wills shared that Respondent's conduct at times lacked courtesy and negatively impacted the morale of the employees of both workplaces. To Deborah Cheek, Respondent knew "how to say things to make you feel like your opinion doesn't matter. It doesn't really get mad, but it puts you down. It makes you feel smaller than anyone else." [TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH CHEEK, Tr., 144]. Deborah Cheek added, "once Judge Gipson gets a thought in her mind it's very hard for her to change her mind. No matter what else is said - what she says is the way it's going to be." [TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH CHEEK, Tr., p. 142].

To Tameka Smith, Chief Deputy of the Register of Wills, Respondent was a "disruptor," explaining that Respondent was "someone you feel doesn't have the full office or staff's best interests at heart, and they're all out for themselves, and you know, or you have experienced when they are around the morale is down, something goes awry, it's always some type of drama. That's what I mean by a disruptor. It's always some type

of drama. And she's just one of those, from my experience, those people.” On one occasion, Ms. Smith reiterated the former Register of Wills had also denial of a prior request from Respondent. After that, Respondent did not speak to Ms. Smith. “Once I told her no, I mean, she hasn’t spoken to me since.” Ms. Smith noted, “if you did not agree with her, regardless of what it was, she then had an issue with you... So it was either her way or no way, and she went to every extent possible she could to make it become her way for whatever the act was, to benefit her.” [TESTIMONY OF TAMEKA SMITH, Tr., pp. 60-62, 67-68].

Other employees of the Orphans’ Court and the Register of Wills had similar experiences with Respondent. Ms. Owens was present in meetings with Respondent that did not “go well” if Respondent did not get her way. If someone else was talking, Respondent “would kind of cut in and interrupt them, and it’s just better to stop it than to keep going that way.” [Tr., pp. 110-111]. To Ms. Recinos. Respondent was “not as reliable as the other judges” and that because of Respondent’s conflicts, “[e]veryone just tries to do their work. Not interfere.” [Tr., pp. 81, 83]. To Ms. Heath, Respondent’s reputation is that she “just does whatever she wants to do” and “doesn’t really look you in the eye” or “talk to you.” [Tr., pp. 176, 179].

Before the Commission, Respondent maintained that Ms. Recinos and Ms. Heath were untruthful. Respondent said “I don’t even know what they look like[.]”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Respondent did not appear at the Hearing on August 21, 2025, the day that Ms. Recinos and Ms. Heath testified.

[TESTIMONY OF JUDGE VICKIE GIPSON, December 5, 2025 Tr., pp. 162, 229-230].

Respondent argued that both witnesses had themselves characterized their interactions with Respondent as “minimal.” The Commission credited Ms. Recinos and Ms. Heath.

**B. Lending the Prestige of Office to Advance Personal Interest and Public Comments on Pending Cases**

**Maryland Rules 18-101.1 (Compliance with the Law); 18-101.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary); 18-101.3 (Avoiding lending the prestige of judicial office); 18-102.15 (Responding to Judicial and Attorney Misconduct); 18-102.16(a) (Cooperation with Disciplinary Authorities)**

The previously delineated Findings of Fact as well as in Section II. C., *infra*, are incorporated herein by reference.

Respondent repeatedly and conspicuously referenced her judicial title, including her designation as “Chief Judge”, in court filings, in testimony, when interacting with law enforcement, and in written communications with judiciary personnel. Her actions were calculated to leverage the prestige of her office solely to advance her personal goals, specifically preferential treatment from the court system, Judiciary personnel, the Commission, and members law enforcement, specifically in attempts to escalate her conflict with Judge Knapp.

Respondent used her Chief Judge position in furtherance of her allegations against Judge Knapp in requests that a Peace Order be issued against him and that criminal charges be pursued. In her Peace Order petition, filed on May 19, 2024, Respondent described herself in the caption as “Chief Judge” and Judge Knapp as “Associate Judge.”

[IC5, JVG000265]. Respondent used the same titles in her Application for Statement of Charges filed the same day, referring to herself as “Chief Judge” in the caption and at the bottom of each page in the field marked as “Printed Name.” [IC11, JVG001157-1160]. Respondent signed each page and wrote her Chief Judge title three times on IC11, JVG001157, twice on IC11, JVG001158, once on IC11, JVG001159, and once on IC11, JVG001160.

During the Peace Order process, Respondent made multiple statements to members of the media concerning cases pending in the District Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County as well as matters under review by the Commission. [IC25]. The Peace Order hearings and the Application for Statement of Charges were reported on by the media, the first report being an article by Royale Bonds in the Baltimore Banner published on May 21, 2024. [IC25, JVG000970-979]. Respondent repeatedly communicated with members of the media in person and through electronic means concerning her conflict with Judge Knapp, the response of the Judiciary, and various matters pending before the Commission. Respondent stipulated that she spoke with Luke Parker of the Baltimore Sun/Capital Gazette outside of a courtroom in the District Court of Maryland on July 16, 2024, and stated, “I’m going to cry,” after her petition for peace order against Judge Knapp was dismissed. [Tr., p. 39]. She also told him there had been a “terrible” dynamic at the Orphans’ Court since she had initiated legal action against Judge Knapp and criticized what she felt were the lack of protections for Orphans’ Court judges, stating, “I feel like nobody is really responsible for the safety of the Orphans’

Court judges in Anne Arundel County.” [Tr., p. 40]. Mr. Parker published an article that same day containing Respondent’s statements. [IC 25, pp. JVG000983-985]. Respondent stated she made the remarks because she “was so hurt that that situation had been handled the way that it had been handled.” [Tr., p. 281]. At the time Respondent made these comments, a criminal matter arising out of the Application for Statement of Charges filed by Respondent was pending in the same court with the caption, State of Maryland v. Marc Knapp, Case No. D-07-CR-24-012919. [IC 11]. This matter was pending until the entry of a *nolle prosequi* on July 26, 2024. [IC 11, p. JVG001162].

Respondent also spoke with Rick Hutzell of the Baltimore Banner on or about July 16, 2024, publicly stating she asked the court system for help with her concerns regarding Judge Knapp while the Commission deliberated the one or more complaints that she stated she claimed to have filed against Judge Knapp with the Commission and that she “got no advice” on what to do. [Tr., pp. 40-41]. She also stated to Mr. Hutzell outside of a courtroom in the District Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County, “I feel like nobody’s really responsible for the safety of judges in Anne Arundel County – at least Orphans’ Court.” [Tr., p. 41]. Again, at the time Respondent made these comments, a criminal matter arising out the Application for Statement of Charges filed by Respondent was still pending in the same court with the caption, State of Maryland v. Marc Knapp. Mr. Hutzell subsequently published an article dated July 26, 2024, titled, “Orphans’ Court Ugliness is a Sign that Maryland Needs to Abolish It” in the Baltimore Banner that contained Respondent’s various statements, described the publicly available information

concerning her dispute with Judge Knapp, and argued, based in part upon Mr. Hutzell's understanding of the conduct of Respondent and Judge Knapp, that the Orphans' Court as an entity should be abolished. [IC 25, pp. JVG000986-97].

Respondent again spoke with Mr. Parker by telephone on or about September 17, 2024, and, referring to the working relationship and procedural operations within the Orphans' Court, stated, "[w]e'll be considering possible options going forward." [Tr., p. 42]. Mr. Parker published an article on September 18, 2024, in the Baltimore Sun/Capital Gazette containing Respondent's statement. [IC 25, pp. JVG001013-15].

Respondent's public discussions and complaints to the media regarding the Orphans' Court and Maryland judiciary brought further disrepute into the public domain and undermined public confidence in the judiciary. Prior to the Hearing, Respondent and Investigative Counsel stipulated to the following facts which were read into evidence and deemed credible by the Commission:

1. Judge Gipson confirmed to a reporter that a peace order had been issued regarding her complaint against Judge Marc Knapp as reported by Royale Bonds in the article titled "Anne Arundel probate judge accused of 'aggressive' outbursts, stalking fellow judge" published on or about May 21, 2024, in The Baltimore Banner. Judge Gipson otherwise declined to comment at that time, saying it is a pending legal matter.
2. Judge Gipson stated to reporters "I'm going to cry" outside of a courtroom in the District Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County after her petition for

peace order against Judge Marc Knapp was dismissed as reported by Luke Parker in the article titled “Peace order against Anne Arundel Orphans’ Court judge Dismissed: ‘I’m going to cry’” published on or about July 16, 2024, in the Baltimore Sun/Capital Gazette.

3. Judge Gipson stated to Luke Parker, a reporter, that there has been a “terrible” dynamic at the Orphans’ Court since she initiated legal action against Judge Marc Knapp and criticized the protections, or lack thereof, for judges in her position. Referring specifically to the fact that the Orphans’ Court had been removed from the Anne Arundel County Circuit Courthouse, she said that the current security set up is not enough and stated, “I feel like nobody is really responsible for the safety of Orphans’ Court Judges in Anne Arundel County,” as reported by Luke Parker in the article titled “Peace order against Anne Arundel Orphans’ Court judge Dismissed: ‘I’m going to cry’” published on or about July 16, 2024, in the Baltimore Sun/Capital Gazette.
4. Judge Gipson publicly stated that she asked the court system for help with her concerns regarding Judge Marc Knapp while the Commission on Judicial Disabilities was deliberating the complaints she had filed against him as reported by Rick Hutzell in the article titled “Orphans’ court [sic] ugliness is a sign that Maryland needs to abolish it”, published on or about July 16, 2024, in the Baltimore Sun/Capital Gazette. The article states that Judge Gipson stated she “got no advice” on what to do.

5. Judge Gipson stated to Rick Hutzell, a reporter, outside of a courtroom in the District Court of Maryland for Anne Arundel County after her petition for peace order against Judge Marc Knapp was dismissed, “I feel like nobody’s really responsible for the safety of judges in Anne Arundel County. At least Orphans’ Court” as reported by Mr. Hutzell in the article titled “Orphans’ court [sic] ugliness is a sign that Maryland needs to abolish it” published on or about July 16, 2024, in The Baltimore Banner.
6. Judge Gipson confirmed to Rick Hutzell, a reporter, that she had filed one or more complaints against Judge Marc Knapp with the Commission on Judicial Disabilities.
7. After the second criminal case against Judge Marc Knapp was dismissed on or about September 17, 2024, Judge Gipson stated to a reporter during a telephone interview, “We’ll be considering possible options going forward” as reported by Luke Parker in the article titled “Second criminal case dropped against Anne Arundel Orphans’ Court judge,” published on or about September 18, 2024, in the Baltimore Sun/Capital Gazette. This statement referred to positive measures aimed at improving future working relationships and procedural operations with the Orphans’ Court.
8. On July 19, 2024, Respondent contacted the Honorable Matthew J. Fader, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Maryland, to report conduct by Judge Knapp and to convey concerns for the well-being of persons working in and

appearing before the Orphan's Court. [Tr., pp. 38-42].

The invocations of Respondent's Chief Judge title often accompanied requests, demands, and accusations designed to give undue weight to her statements and to influence the actions of those with whom she was communicating. Those requests included that Judge Knapp be removed, suspended, barred from, or limited access to the courthouse, eventually escalating to requests that she be issued a Peace Order against him and that he be criminally charged. Respondent relied upon her title while speaking with the media, both in person and on the telephone, keenly aware that their interest in her workplace dispute was solely due to her and Judge Knapp's status as elected judicial officials. Also alarming about Respondent's invocation of her title was her doing so along with a repeated insistence that her safety was threatened and that, by failing to immediately comply with her demands, the person with whom she was communicating was putting a judicial officer, the Chief Judge, in danger of harm. Through these actions, the Respondent invoked the prestige of her judicial office to advance her personal dispute with Judge Knapp.

Respondent stated at her deposition that she made the comments because "I didn't perceive that as violating any kind of ethical code or whatever, because it wasn't talking about specifics. I was speaking generally about my personal feelings about what was going on with the [C]ommission." [Tr., pp. 282-283]. At the Hearing, Respondent placed blame for her conduct on the Commission and Investigative Counsel, stating "I didn't know that, you know, I was doing something wrong, why didn't the Commission, who

was aware of what I was doing, come and tell me? [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE VICKIE GIPSON, December 5, 2025 Tr., p. 240].

Respondent is deemed to know and required to comply with the law. Md. Rule 18-101.1.

**C. Breach of Confidentiality of Commission Matters**

**Maryland Rules 18-101.1 (Compliance with the Law); 18-101.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary); 18-101.3 (Avoiding Lending the Prestige of Judicial Office); 18-102.12 (Supervisory Duties); 18-102.16(a) (Cooperation with Disciplinary Authorities)**

The previously delineated Findings of Fact as well as in Section II. E., *infra*, are incorporated herein by reference.

Respondent failed to maintain the confidentiality of matters before the Commission. Complaints and information relating to complaints against judges filed with the Commission, including the identity of the subject judges, the identity of complainants, all proceedings under Rules 18-421, and deliberations before the Commission are confidential and not open to the public. Md. Rule 18-407(a)(2) and (4). Respondent is presumed to know the law, including the Maryland Rules, but she was also advised of the restrictions of Rule 18-407 in multiple letters from Investigative Counsel, the earliest dated April 26, 2024. [IC2 and IC4]. Respondent provided details regarding Commission complaints in open court, to the media, and law enforcement. Respondent also provided confidential materials concerning complaints filed with the Commission to Officer Karen Oliffe of the Anne Arundel County Police Department. [IC18; IC33]. The

information disclosed by Respondent was provided to degrade or attempt to punish Judge Knapp with arrest or removal, not for a legitimate legal or criminal purpose. There was no written waiver(s) signed by the subject judge(s) that permitted the disclosure of the Commission's confidential information. Md. Rule 18-407(b)(1).

Respondent repeatedly violated Rule 18-407. She discussed having personally filed complaints with the Commission concerning another judge, and claimed to be aware of the existence of complaints filed by others. She made these statements in open court, to members of the media, in telephone calls and emails with law enforcement and unrelated Judiciary personnel, and in emails and conversations with personnel of the Orphans' Court and Register of Wills. The confidentiality of those complaints was not Respondent's to waive. Respondent insinuated knowledge of the confidential deliberations of the Commission when she testified during the second Temporary Peace Order hearing on July 17, 2024, stating, "I believe the Judicial Disabilities does have the authority to temporarily remove him (Judge Knapp) and they choose not to. [IC14, JVG000525].

Respondent continued to place blame on the Commission for not placing Judge Knapp on administrative leave during her deposition on July 18, 2025, stating, "There's – the way the rules – I know that's not the way that it's interpreted. So – but none of this would have happened had the Commission made the recommendation and not conflated what was being perceived as an interpersonal dispute when it really wasn't, so." [Tr., p. 271]. She repeated these accusations in her testimony and closing argument at the

Hearing on December 5, 2025, and went so far as to blame Investigative Counsel for “sucking” her into a “quagmire” that could affect Respondent’s showing in her next political campaign. [TESTIMONY OF JUDGE VICKIE GIPSON, December 5, 2025, Tr., pp. 175-176].

**D. Failure to Follow Legislatively Enacted Requirements for the Operation of the Orphan’s Court and the Failure to Correct or Report the Misconduct of Others**

**Maryland Rules 18-101.1 (Compliance with the Law); 18-101.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary); 18-101.3 (Avoiding Lending the Prestige of Judicial Office); 18-102.5 (Competence, Diligence, and Cooperation); 18-102.12 (Supervisory Duties); 18-102.15 (Responding to Judicial and Attorney Misconduct); 18-102.16 (a) (Cooperation with Disciplinary Authorities)**

The previously delineated Findings of Fact are incorporated herein by reference.

Respondent failed to follow Maryland law, specifically the Code of Judicial Conduct, when she did not report and conversely, approved Judge Duba’s absences and tardy arrivals, to the detriment of her court, staff, and the public’s confidence in the judiciary.

As mentioned previously, Maryland law requires the Orphans’ Court for Anne Arundel County to convene for court sessions on at least two full business days each week and more often when necessary. [MD. CODE ANN., ESTATES & TRUSTS § 2-106(h)] [IC 28]. The Anne Arundel County Code further provides that those sessions are to occur between 10:00am and 3:00pm on the designated days. [Anne Arundel County Code, Art. 2, § 2-3-201] [IC 28]. Judge Duba was elected by the citizens of Anne Arundel County to be a judge on the Orphans’ Court. Therefore, a duty was owed by

him to comply with the law and appear in court on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 10am and 3pm. He was paid the same as judges who complied with the law and performed their duties. Ironically, instead of reporting Judge Duba for failing to be present, Respondent called the police on Judge Knapp while he was on the bench to perform his duties. Respondent's conduct was inappropriate, and a misuse of authority, on both fronts.

**E. Failure to Cooperate with Commission Directives**

**Maryland Rules 18-101.1 (Compliance with the Law); 18-101.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary); 18-101.3 (Avoiding Lending the Prestige of Judicial Office); 18-102.16 (a) (Cooperation with Disciplinary Authorities)**

Respondent refused to cooperate with the Commission's investigative process as dictated by the Maryland Rules. Maryland Rule 18-421 provides "[t]he Commission shall refer all complaints and other written allegations of disability, impairment, or misconduct against a judge to Investigative Counsel." As to the conduct of investigations, Maryland Rule 18-422 states if a complaint is not dismissed in accordance with Rule 18-421, Investigative Counsel shall conduct an investigation to determine whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that the judge...may have committed sanctionable conduct. Investigative Counsel shall inform the Board and the Commission promptly that the investigation is being undertaken. (D) Content. Investigative Counsel's notification to the judge shall be in writing and shall state: (i) that Investigative Counsel has undertaken an investigation into whether the judge has a disability or impairment or

has committed sanctionable conduct; (ii) whether the investigation was undertaken on Investigative Counsel's initiative or on a complaint; (iii) if the investigation was undertaken on a complaint, the name of the person who filed the complaint and the contents of the complaint; (iv) the nature of the alleged disability, impairment, or sanctionable conduct under investigation; and (v) the judge's rights under subsection (a)(5) of this Rule:

*“(5) Opportunity of Judge to Respond. Upon the issuance of notice pursuant to subsection (a)(4) of this Rule, Investigative Counsel shall afford the judge a reasonable opportunity prior to concluding the investigation to present such information as the judge chooses and shall give due consideration to the judge's response before concluding the investigation.”*

The Rules are clear that Respondent was obligated to respond solely to Investigative Counsel prior to the conclusion of the investigation(s). Md. Rule 18-422(a)(4)(D) and (a)(5). Upon conclusion of an investigation, matters will be subject to disposition by the Commission, even if matters proceed first to the Judicial Inquiry Board. Md. Rule 18-423.

Respondent was advised of the existence of four of the five investigations underlying this matter by letters dated May 30, July 9, and July 17, 2024. [IC2; IC4].<sup>16</sup> After Respondent called the chambers of the Commission Chair on July 19, 2024, the Commission Chair emailed Respondent acknowledging the call, stated she was out of the office that day, and advised Respondent to “[p]lease feel free to email me or to call/email

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<sup>16</sup> Respondent received notice of the fifth investigation on October 10, 2024. [IC2].

[Executive Counsel] next Tuesday afternoon when she returns.” [IC21, JVG000172].

Respondent replied shortly thereafter, stating, “I would like to speak with you. When would you be available for meeting?” [IC21, JVG000171]. The Commission Chair responded at 4:50 pm stating she would confer with Executive Counsel and respond to Respondent’s request thereafter. [IC21, JVG000172].

At 4:54 pm on July 19, 2024, Respondent sent another email to the Commission, copying the Commission Chair, with the subject line “Response to CJD Complaints from [names of Complainants] & and [sic] Request for Escalation to Judge Albright.” [IC21, JVG000173-174]. Respondent’s email began “I received a letter from your office on July 17<sup>th</sup> asking for a response by July 19<sup>th</sup>. Please accept this email as my response to the allegations raised in the complaints referenced above.”

The body of the email contained Respondent’s response to the notice of investigation letters from Investigative Counsel, a general denial of wrongdoing, as well as aspersions about the individuals filing complaints against her; allegations against Judge Knapp; and allegations that “CJD’s dilatory handling of all of the judicial disability complaints regarding this volatile situation have not only personally damaged me but they have encouraged events that may lead to negative inferences upon our judiciary as a whole” and that “the acceptance of the false allegations by CJD as presented in the complaints referenced above shows bias and lack of objectivity as well as the lack of concern for my overall well being as a judge.” [IC2; IC21, JVG000173-174].

Respondent concluded her email with a request for escalation to Judge Albright and

Chief Justice Fader and that the current complaints and “any other baseless complaint that is pending or that may come in later related to my handing of the situation concerning Judge Knapp’s inappropriate behavior be immediately dropped.” [IC21, JVG000173-174]. The Commission Chair replied with an acknowledgment email. [IC21, JVG000175].

On July 22, 2024, Respondent sent a subsequent email to the Commission Chair addressing a separate investigation underlying this matter, again requesting the matter “be escalated as it should have never been accepted” and asserted that any investigation “should be immediately dismissed for failure to make a *prima facie* case of misconduct.” [IC21, JVG000178]. The Commission Chair responded that day asking Respondent to direct her email to Executive Counsel.

Executive Counsel contacted Respondent by letter dated July 24, 2024, acknowledging that the Commission was in receipt of Respondent’s emails to the Commission Chair and advising “all communication should be directed to Investigative Counsel.” [IC24, JVG000191]. Respondent ignored this request and copied Executive Counsel on substantive communications regarding investigations dated August 13, 2024 [IC20, JVG000203]; October 1 and 8, 2024 [IC20, JVG000206-207]; October 17, 2024 [IC20, JVG000213]; and October 28, 2024 [IC20, JVG000215]. On October 28, 2024, Respondent again copied Executive Counsel on a separate email exchange initiated by Investigative Counsel related to the pending investigations. [IC20, JVG000217].

Investigative Counsel separately wrote to Respondent by email dated October 29,

2024, stating, “Please refrain from copying [Executive Counsel] or others on correspondence regarding matters that are currently under investigation.” [IC20, JVG000220]. Respondent replied, again copying Executive Counsel now in contravention of the request of both Executive Counsel and Investigative Counsel, stating, “I apologize. I sent it to her because I mistakenly thought she was your direct supervisor. Who would that be so I can forward my concerns to the correct person?” [IC20, JVG000224]. Investigative Counsel informed Respondent, in an email copying Executive Counsel dated October 30, 2024, that she served at the pleasure of the Commission, noting, “Any concerns may be directed to the Commission Chair.” [IC20, JVG000230].

The Commission Chair sent a letter dated October 30, 2024, to Respondent via email asking that any questions regarding a current investigation be addressed to Investigative Counsel and any “concerns outside of the substance of investigations” to the Commission. [IC24, JVG000237]. Respondent replied, in an email addressed to Executive Counsel and copying Investigative Counsel on October 31, 2024, asking for clarification and requesting to copy Executive Counsel on certain communications. [IC22, JVG000238]. Executive Counsel responded on November 4, 2024, suggesting Respondent consult legal counsel for additional questions. [IC22, JVG000239]. Respondent replied to this email the same day, stating she was not in a position to retain counsel and, contrary to the clear instructions from the Commission Chair in her letter dated October 30, stated “I will assume that the letter from Judge Albright authorizes me

to copy you on communications with [I]nvestigative [C]ounsel until told otherwise.” [IC22, JVG000241]. Executive Counsel replied to this email on November 6, 2024, repeating the Commission Chair’s instructions contained in her October 30<sup>th</sup> letter.

Respondent again wrote to Executive Counsel on November 6, 2024, copying Investigative Counsel. [IC22, JVG000246-249]. In this email, Respondent claimed she had “concerns outside the substantive investigation” and that she was writing to Executive Counsel “to continue to make you aware of” her concerns. Respondent then detailed various substantive allegations against Judge Knapp, complained that the Commission was taking “excruciatingly long” to complete its investigation and the Commission should take “a trauma-informed care approach.” Executive Counsel replied via letter dated November 22, 2024, stating Respondent’s concerns had been shared with the Chair of the Commission as well as the Chair of the Judicial Inquiry Board. [IC22, JVG000250; IC24, JVG000255]. Executive Counsel also advised Respondent again of the applicable law governing matters before the Commission as well as suggesting she review the Commission’s website.

Based on the foregoing factual findings, the Commission found by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent engaged in sanctionable conduct in violation of Maryland Rules 18-101.1, 18-101.2, 18-101.3, 18-102.5(a) and (b), 18-102.8(a) and (b), 18-102.12, 18-102.15(a) and (b), and 18-102.16(a). The Commission found there was insufficient evidence to conclude by clear and convincing evidence that Chief Judge Gipson’s conduct violated Maryland Rules 18-102.3, 18-102.10 or 18-103.1(d) and (e).

### **III. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

A. The Commission has both subject matter jurisdiction over the above-entitled case and personal jurisdiction over Judge Vickie Gipson, all pursuant to Md. Const., Art. 4, §4A and §4B. Chief Judge Gipson was, at all relevant times, a judge of the Orphans' Court for Anne Arundel County. Therefore, Respondent was and still is a judicial officer whose conduct was and is subject to the provisions of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct, (Maryland Rules Title 18, Chapter 100) and Maryland Rules on Judicial Discipline (Title 18, Chapter 400).

B. The Commission is guided by the clear and convincing evidence standard in determining whether a judge has committed sanctionable conduct per Maryland Rule 18-406. Based upon the Commission's findings as to the specific facts and violations of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct, as set forth in the Findings of Fact, supra, the Commission finds by clear and convincing evidence that Chief Judge Vickie Gipson has committed sanctionable conduct, as defined by Maryland Rule 18-402(m)(1), specifically misconduct while in office, the persistent failure to perform the duties of the judge's office, and conduct prejudicial to the proper administration of justice, by violating the Rules of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct as follows:

1. By failing to follow legislatively enacted requirements for the operation of the Orphans' Court, the failure to take appropriate corrective measures or report the misconduct of another judge, condoning and approving the misconduct of another judge, Respondent violated Rules 18- 101.1, 18-102.12, and 18-102.15.

2. By failing to exercise proper decorum and courtesy, failing to perform administrative duties competently, interfering with the operations of the Orphans' Court, and undermining public confidence in the judiciary, Respondent violated Rules 18-101.1, 18-101.2, 18-102.5, and 18-102.8.

3. By breaching the confidentiality of Commission matters, Respondent failed to cooperate with the Commission and violated Rules 18-101.1, 18-101.2, and 18-102.16.

4. By lending the prestige of office to advance personal interests and public comments degrading the Orphans' Court and judiciary, including the Commission, , Respondent violated Rules 18-101.1, 18-101.2, 18-101.3, and 18-102.16(a).

4. By engaging in loud arguments with a judicial colleague that were heard by Register of Wills staff and the public; being confrontational to a judicial colleague on the bench (including calling the police), before the public, and in chambers, Respondent violated Rules 18-101.1, 18-102.5, and 18-102.8 of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct. Rule 18-102.8(b) requires that a judge “. . . patient, dignified, and courteous to . . . court officials and others with whom the judge deals in an official capacity.” For judges who are members of a multi-judge panel, there is no separate or different rule. Respondent, as an independently elected Judge of the Orphans' Court, was not required to agree with Judge Knapp (or Judge Duba) regarding legal rulings in cases before the court. Nor was she required to refrain from stating her opinion. But, Respondent was required, whether she agreed or disagreed with Judge Knapp and Judge Duba, to remain patient, dignified, and courteous which she failed to do.

5. Respondent violated Rules 18-101.1 and 18-102.16. of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct by failing to cooperate with Commission.

The above factual findings by the Commission as to the conduct of Respondent are proof of, and constitute, violations of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct, specifically Maryland Rules 18-101.1, 18-101.2, 18-101.3, 18-102.5(a) and (b), 18-102.8(a) and (b), 18-102.12, 18-102.15(a) and (b), and 18-102.16(a).

#### **IV. CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE IMPOSITION OF DISCIPLINE**

The Preamble to the Maryland Rules governing judicial discipline provides 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. [Emphasis added.]

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.

A. As to the appropriate discipline in a judicial conduct case, the Commission is guided by the General Provisions of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct, Maryland Rule 18-100.1 (b)(1)(B), which provides:

Whether discipline should be imposed should be determined through a reasonable and reasoned application of the Rules and should depend upon factors such as the seriousness of the transgression, the facts and circumstances at the time of the transgression, the extent of any pattern of improper activity, whether there have been previous violations, and the effect of the improper activity upon the judicial system or others.

The Supreme Court of Maryland has provided guidance for imposing judicial discipline:

It is the constitutional responsibility of this Court to fashion judicial discipline in a manner that preserves the integrity and independence of the Judiciary and reaffirms, maintains and restores public confidence in the administration of justice. Any sanction must be designed to discourage others from engaging in similar conduct and to assure the public that the Judiciary will not condone judicial misconduct. Judicial discipline is not to punish. The goal of the canons of judicial conduct “is to hold the office of judge above suspicion of abuse of power.” Judicial discipline is “not for purposes of vengeance or retribution, but to instruct the public and all judges, ourselves included, of the importance of the function performed by judges in a free society.” As we have stated repeatedly, both in judicial discipline matters, as well as attorney discipline matters, our considerations are “the maintenance of the honor and dignity of the judiciary and the proper administration of justice rather than the punishment of the individual.” The sanction must inform the public that we recognize that there has been judicial misconduct, must be sufficient to deter the offending judge from repeating the conduct in the future, and must be sufficient to deter others from engaging in similar conduct. (Internal citations omitted.)

In re Lamdin, 404 Md. 631, 652–53 (2008)

Prior to conducting the hearing on August 21, 2025, the Commission considered and denied Respondent's motions, including a postponement request. Respondent did not appear for the Hearing on August 21, 2025, as she scheduled an event to conflict with the Hearing, and Investigative Counsel concluded its case-in-chief. Because Respondent did not appear on August 21, the Commission canceled the hearing day scheduled for August 22, 2025. The Commission then recessed the Hearing until October 10, 2025.

On October 10, 2025, the Commission Members were present. Respondent did not appear in person. Respondent had moved to postpone the October 10 hearing as she alleged she was unable to appear. Respondent was allowed to be present via Zoom while the Commission conducted a closed motions hearing on Respondent's postponement request. After due consideration, the Commission granted Respondent's motion to postpone, rescheduled the hearing until December 5, 2025, and notified members of the public who appeared to observe the October 10, 2025 hearing. Following the October 10 hearing, the Commission issued an Order rescheduling the hearing until December 5, 2025 and requiring Respondent to notify the Commission on or before November 18, 2025 if she wished to participate virtually for the December 5 hearing. Respondent did not request to participate virtually prior to November 18.

On November 26, 2025, Respondent moved to reschedule the December 5, 2025 hearing alleging she had an event that would make her unavailable. The Commission issued an Order denying Respondent's request to reschedule.

After the Hearing, the Commission reviewed proposed Findings of Fact

and Conclusions of Law submitted by Investigative Counsel and by Respondent.

Investigative Counsel recommended that, at a minimum, Respondent be suspended by the Supreme Court of Maryland with her return subject to evaluation and approval of a professional of the Commission's choosing and to be subject to mentoring, education, and training during a probationary period; Respondent requested that she be ordered to meet with a mentor; she suggested peer review<sup>17</sup> and mentoring as anything else would be unfair.

The public bestows the highest level of respect to our judges; in turn, we expect our judges to hold themselves to high standards, personally and professionally at all times. Chief Judge Gipson abused the power bestowed upon her by the citizens and Governor of Maryland. As Chief Judge, Respondent allowed Judge Duba not to work the mandated hours, undermined Judge Knapp, and prevented Judge Knapp from dissenting, all to the detriment of the Orphans' Court, staff, litigants and the judiciary. Respondent's abuse of the power and misuse of the prestige of judicial office were apparent from her interactions with the police, the court, and media, all to the further detriment of the Orphans' Court and diminishing the public's confidence in the judiciary.

Chief Judge Gipson did not meet the high judicial standards, demonstrated by her pattern of unprofessional conduct over an extended period. During her disagreements

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<sup>17</sup> Respondent's request for a peer review panel was considered and denied by the Judicial Inquiry Board; Respondent was notified of the denial when the Board Report was issued in December of 2024 recommending the filing of Charges. The convening of a peer review panel is discretionary pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-423(b)(2)(A).

with Judge Knapp and other colleagues, some of which became public, Respondent failed to maintain proper judicial decorum. She made administrative changes that had the effect of limiting Judge Knapp's judicial independence, altering the hours of operation of the Orphans' Court to not have to preside with only Judge Knapp, and impermissibly using her role as Chief Judge to attempt to have law enforcement remove Judge Knapp from the courtroom due to their interpersonal conflict. Respondent used her Chief Judge title in filings requesting peace orders and criminal charges against Judge Knapp in the District Court for Anne Arundel County. Chief Judge Gipson undermined the public's confidence in the judiciary when she argued with Judge Knapp, in chambers so loudly that members of the public could hear it, and on the bench. Chief Judge Gipson also did not promote confidence in the judiciary when she made comments critical of her court and the judiciary to the media.

Respondent had five complaints with substantive concerns prior to the filing of charges by the Commission. Her actions adversely affect the citizens of Anne Arundel County and betray the trust they provided when they elected her to judicial office. Chief Judge Gipson's misconduct was calculated, continuous, and egregious.

In mitigation of the instant Charges against Respondent, the Commission considered that Judge Knapp was the primary aggressor in the interpersonal conflicts with Respondent. Despite the workplace conflict or interpersonal issues, judges are always obligated to engage in conduct that does not defy the Code. Although the interpersonal dispute between Respondent and Judge Knapp was two-sided, Respondent

has taken little to no responsibility for her conduct. Respondent is responsible for her sanctionable conduct in engaging in loud arguments with Judge Knapp that were heard by the public. Respondent is also responsible for her conduct outside of the arguments, including misusing her Chief Judge title to call the police because Judge Knapp did not follow her directive to leave the bench, as well as using her title in court filings requesting peace orders and criminal charges. Moreover, Respondent's sanctionable conduct included intentional actions to limit the exercise of judicial independence of one judge while approving another judge's misconduct in failing to perform his judicial duties.

Instead of taking accountability for her conduct, Respondent instead put forth a defiant posture towards the Commission as well as a disregard for the rules enacted to govern the judicial discipline process, from investigation through disposition. The Commission considered Respondent's assertion that she was in fear of Judge Knapp and believed she was following what she interpreted as a directive from the Commission to take certain actions against Judge Knapp, specifically contacting the Office of Judicial Threat Management, calling emergency services when Judge Knapp refused to leave the courtroom, and filing for a peace order and application for statement of charges. Calling 911 due to a judge's refusal to follow her direction to leave the bench is unacceptable, separate and apart from that judge's conduct.

Before the Commission, Respondent attempted to justify the 911 call by insisting that she relied on an email from Investigative Counsel stating if she believed that

Respondent, her colleagues, and/or staff were “in immediate danger you should consider (1) contacting law enforcement, (2) contacting the Judicial Threat Management Center of the Maryland Judiciary . . . , and/or (3) filing the appropriate petition with the Court.” [IC 20, p. JVG000082; R1].

Before the Commission, however, Respondent made no showing that she or her colleagues were “in immediate danger” from Judge Knapp’s refusal to leave the bench as Respondent had directed. Nor did Investigative Counsel direct Respondent to interfere with the operations of the Orphans’ Court, lend the prestige of her office to her actions, make negative comments about her court and the judiciary, breach the confidentiality of Commission matters, or any of the other sanctionable conduct she has committed.

Ultimately, the Commission does not credit Respondent’s repeated assertions that the Commission and Investigative Counsel are responsible for her conduct or that either had any affirmative duty to educate Respondent as to her obligations under the Code of Judicial Conduct. To the contrary, Respondent’s failure to accept responsibility for her conduct is an aggravating factor in this decision.

In addition to Respondent’s failure to accept responsibility for her conduct, the Commission considered as aggravating factors the materials provided by Investigative Counsel for disposition purposes and finds they weigh in favor of a more severe sanction. Items considered by the Commission following the determination that Respondent committed sanctionable conduct included various filings and Commission Orders that demonstrate Respondent’s failure to comply with the Commission’s Amended

Scheduling Order; Respondent's failure to cooperate with Investigative Counsel in responding to discovery and failing to appear when Investigative Counsel first noticed Respondent's deposition; and Respondent's failure to abide by various deadlines. [IC Disposition Packet]. Respondent's conduct before the Commission prior to and during the prehearing process also included the failure to cooperate with the Commission during the investigative process (despite repeated requests from Commission staff to access the rules governing judicial conduct and to respect the process), and making inflammatory statements within her correspondence to the Commission and subsequent filings.

Although the Charges in this case clearly lay out the sanctionable conduct by Chief Judge Gipson, she chose to operate as a victim instead of acknowledging and taking responsibility for her conduct. Notably, the first paragraph of Respondent's Response to Charges, filed on March 21, 2025, erroneously stated Judge Knapp "has gone without discipline by the Commission for close to a year after the Commission was notified of Judge Knapp's egregiously hostile behavior against Judge Gipson and other members of the Court." At the time this response was filed, Respondent and her counsel were fully aware that Charges were simultaneously pending against Judge Knapp. Subsequent to Chief Judge Gipson's Response to Charges, the Commission noted the following:

- Respondent filed, through counsel, Judge Vickie Gipson's Motion For Reconsideration of Charges on April 3, 2025; a May 1, 2025 Commission Order was issued denying the motion. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition

- Materials, pp. 009-014].
- The Commission issued an Amended Scheduling Order on April 15, 2025 scheduling the Hearing for 8/21, 8/22 and 10/10/25. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 023-026].
  - Respondent filed Judge Vickie Gipson's Motion to Strike Publicizing of These Proceedings and Statement of Charges on May 14, 2025; a May 14, 2025 Commission Order was issued denying the motion pursuant to Maryland Rules 18-407(a)(3) and 18-431(e)(2). [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 027-032].
  - A Commission Order was issued on June 23, 2025 finding Respondent failed to fully produce requested discovery following a Motion to Compel Discovery filed by Investigative Counsel, and response from Respondent. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, p. 138].
  - Respondent's counsel filed a Motion to Withdraw Appearance on June 5, 2025. Respondent did not file a response to her counsel's motion prior to the Commission's June 23, 2025 deadline. Her counsel's appearance was stricken by the Commission on June 24, 2025. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 059-061].
  - By agreement of the parties, Respondent's June 25, 2025 deposition was rescheduled until July 7, 2025 as Respondent was looking for new counsel after her former counsel's appearance was stricken. [IC Disposition Packet: IC

- Disposition Materials, pp. 140-141].
- On June 27, 2025, Respondent filed a Motion to Extend Time requesting a ninety day extension to notify the Commission of Respondent's intent to proceed *pro se* or retain new counsel; a July 1, 2025 Commission Order was issued denying the motion as moot. The Commission issued a Notice Pursuant to MD Rule 2-132(c) notifying Respondent unless new counsel enters an appearance within fifteen days, absence of counsel will not be grounds for continuing any hearing or deadline. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 142-144].
  - Per the Certification of Good Faith Attempts to Resolve Discovery Dispute filed by Investigative Counsel, Respondent did not comply with the Commission's Order compelling Respondent to provide supplemental discovery on or before June 30, 2025. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, p. 204].
  - Respondent filed a Motion to Stay Discovery Deadlines pending Retention of Counsel on June 30, 2025; a July 1, 2025 Commission Order was issued granting the motion in part and extended the deadlines for discovery and motions and rescheduled Respondent's Pre-Hearing Conference date. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 145-146].
  - By agreement of the parties, Respondent's July 7, 2025 deposition was rescheduled until July 18, 2025. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition

- Materials, pp. 519-520].
- On July 16, 2025, Respondent directed correspondence to Investigative Counsel with the subject line “Objection to Deposition Scheduled for July 18, 2025 and Pre-Hearing Conference Scheduled for July 16, 2025.” [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 195-196].
  - Respondent filed a Motion to Dismiss on July 16, 2025 (submitted with an illegible page). [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 175-185].
  - Respondent initially refused to appear at the slotted time for her July 18, 2025 deposition. Respondent subsequently appeared for the deposition.
  - Respondent failed to comply with the deadline for submitting her Pre-Hearing Statement to the Commission which was due on August 7, 2025. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, p. 301].
  - On July 28, 2025, Respondent filed a Combined Reply in Support of Motion to Dismiss... Respondent stated, “[w]hat is at stake is not just missed deadlines or misunderstood rules – but the Commission’s inexplicable decision to prosecute the victim of violence while delaying charges against the aggressor, Judge Marc Knapp, who is white and male. That decision resulted in Judge Gipson - the Black woman who reported the threats – facing public hearing first, while the person the Commission itself labeled the ‘primary aggressor’ faced no immediate accountability. That sequence alone sends a dangerous institutional message: the victim goes on trial before the aggressor.” Respondent’s Motion

- to Dismiss was denied via a July 28, 2025 Commission Order. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 245-250].
- Respondent filed a Motion to Postpone Public Hearing Pending Prior Adjudication of Charges Against Acknowledged Primary Aggressor on August 1, 2025 requesting to reschedule Respondent's hearing dates (August 21, 22 and October 10, 2025) until after Judge Knapp's hearing dates (October 14, 29, and 30, 2025). [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 255-258].
  - Respondent filed a Motion to Dismiss for Due Process Violations on August 18, 2025. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 337-342].  
Although exhibits for the Hearing were due on August 18, 2025, Respondent did not submit exhibits to the Commission.
  - On August 18, 2025, Respondent filed a motion, placed under seal by the Commission, seeking to postpone the August 21, 2025 hearing date until "a date after October 30, 2025, or the earliest practicable date thereafter" due to a scheduled event. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 368-372].
  - The immediately preceding three motions were considered and denied prior to the Commission beginning the Hearing on August 21, 2025. [Other Papers Filed].

Respondent's motion to postpone filed three days prior to August 21, 2025, the first day of the Commission Hearing, claimed that she would be on leave until October,

2025. [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 368-372]. Investigative Counsel filed a response in opposition to the postponement on August 19. On August 20, 2025, Chief Judge Gipson, despite claiming to be unavailable, filed a reply to Investigative Counsel's opposition to her postponement motion (“Reply”). [IC Disposition Packet: IC Disposition Materials, pp. 386-396]. At the Motions Hearing conducted by the Commission prior to the start of the Hearing on August 21, Deputy Assistant Investigative Counsel Bayne stated Respondent “cited various cases in her motion...[a]nd to be candid, of the ones that I could find, some of which are either not Maryland cases or don’t have the citations that she cited...” [December 5, 2025 Tr. p. 12]. The Commission determined three of the cases identified in Respondent’s Reply either did not exist or did not put forward the proposition(s) cited by respondent, namely “*J.M. v. W.T.*, 160 Md. App. 173, 188-90 (2004)”; “*Kirkland v. State*, 171 Md. App. 770, 781–82 (2006)”; and “*Feaster v. Feaster*, 359 Md. 106, 753 A.2d 1016 (2000).” These cases could not be verified or traced to any reported Maryland decision.<sup>18</sup> The above citations do not correspond to actual published opinions and could potentially have been drawn from a secondary or automatically generated source, rather than from an official reporter.

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<sup>18</sup> *Peterson v. Orphans' Ct. For Queen Anne's Cnty.*, 160 Md. App. 137 (2004) is the reported opinion at 160 Md. App. at 173. *Dutton v. State* is the reported opinion at 160 Md. App. 180 (2004). It continues to 160 Md. App. at 189; *Williams v. Mayor & City Council of Baltimore* is the reported opinion at 359 Md. 101 (2000). It continues to 359 Md. at 106. The Commission cannot locate any case starting at, or continuing to, 171 Md. App. 770.

After consideration of the Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and the considerations regarding the imposition of discipline, it is the Commission's unanimous view that the imposition of a suspension, reprimand or censure is not commensurate with the gravity of Chief Judge Gipson's misconduct. Nor would such lesser discipline reassure the public, and the judiciary, that Chief Judge Gipson is fit to sit as an Orphans' Court judge. The Commission concludes that Chief Judge Gipson's conduct requires the imposition of the most serious sanction.

Respondent's sanctionable conduct in the current matters, her conduct during the Commission's investigation and public hearing process, and prior disciplinary history combine to warrant imposition of the most serious sanction by the Supreme Court of Maryland. Accordingly, by a unanimous vote of the Commission Members, the Commission recommends that Respondent be removed from judicial office. Due to the gravity of Respondent's sanctionable conduct, the Orphans' Court would be well served without Chief Judge Gipson. She lacks the requisite conduct, interpersonal skills, leadership and accountability to remain a member of Maryland's judiciary. Accordingly, upon consideration of the actions of Chief Judge Gipson, the violation of Maryland Rules 18-402(m), 18-101.1, 18-101.2, 18-101.3, 18-102.5(a) and (b), 18-102.8(a) and (b), 18-102.12, 18-102.15(a) and (b), and 18-102.16(a), the entire record, the seriousness of the transgressions, the extended period of misconduct, statements rendered by Chief Judge Gipson in her testimony regarding the misconduct, and the impact of the misconduct on the public and judiciary, the Commission found that it was in the best interest of the public

and judicial system for Chief Judge Gipson to be removed from judicial office.

B. The Commission hereby refers this matter to the Supreme Court of Maryland with a recommendation to impose the discipline set forth herein.

As such, the Commission issues these Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law and refers this matter to the Supreme Court of Maryland for expedited consideration.

**V. ORDER, RECOMMENDATION, AND REFERRAL TO THE SUPREME COURT OF MARYLAND**

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that:

A. The Commission, by unanimous vote, found by clear and convincing evidence that Chief Judge Gipson has committed sanctionable conduct, as defined by current Maryland Rule 18-402(m), by violating the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct, as set forth above.

B. The Commission, by unanimous vote, hereby refers the above-captioned matter to the Supreme Court of Maryland with its recommendation as follows:

The removal of Judge Vickie Gipson as an Orphans' Court Judge for Anne Arundel County Maryland for violations committed in CJD 2024-051, CJD 2024-053, CJD 2024-054, CJD 2024-069, and CJD 2024-109.

C. The Chair is authorized by all the Commission Members to sign this decision for all those Commission Members present at the Hearing. The signature pages for the Commission Members shall be retained in the Commission file.

D. The Executive Counsel of the Commission is to take all necessary steps to file

with the Supreme Court of Maryland the entire hearing record, which shall be certified by the Chair of the Commission and shall include the transcript of the proceedings, all exhibits, and other papers filed or marked for identification in the proceeding, as required by Maryland Rule 18-435(e)(4). The entire hearing record shall be provided to the judge.

E. The Executive Counsel is to, pursuant to Maryland Rule 18-404(b), promptly serve Chief Judge Gipson, via electronic mail, the notice of the filing of the record and a copy of the Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, Order and Recommendation by the Commission in this matter.

F. This document, all exhibits introduced into evidence, and the transcript are hereby entered into the record in the name of the Commission.

Dated this 13th day of May, 2026.

Maryland Commission on Judicial Disabilities

By: *Anne Albright*

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The Honorable Anne K. Albright, Chair  
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