



NEW YORK STATE
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Judicial Conduct Commission Releases Annual Report of Activity in 2020

Despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct handled more than 1,500 complaints of judicial misconduct in 2020 and publicly disciplined more judges (24) than in any year since 2009. It also reduced the number of cases pending at year's end by 23%, despite begin understaffed by 25%.¹

In the Annual Report of its activities for 2020, released today, the Commission reported the following:

- 1,504 new complaints were received and processed.
- 318 preliminary inquiries were conducted.²
- 351 full-fledged investigations were undertaken: 120 new ones and 231 carried forward from 2019.
- 2 judges were removed from office for egregious misconduct.
- 9 judges resigned and publicly agreed never to return to judicial office.

¹ The Commission is authorized for 51 full-time employees but at present has only 38.

² Defined in the Commission rules as the preliminary analysis, clarification and fact-finding activity intended to aid the Commission in determining whether or not to investigate a complaint.

- 10 other judges resigned while complaints were pending, where it had not been determined permanent departure from office was warranted or appropriate.³
- 13 judges were publicly censured or admonished.
- 34 judges were issued confidential cautionary letters.
- 177 matters were pending at year's end, down 23% from 231.
- Beginning in March, due to the pandemic, most agency business was conducted virtually.

Established in the State Constitution as an independent agency in 1978, the Commission evaluates and investigates complaints of misconduct against judges of the state unified court system and, where appropriate, disciplines such judges for ethics violations. Through 2020, it rendered public decisions against 886 judges, including 175 who were removed from office and 97 who resigned and publicly agreed never to return to the bench.

All Commission decisions and the Annual Report are available on the agency's website: www.cjc.ny.gov.⁴

Commentary

In a special section, the Annual Report comments on Bias and Equal Justice in the Courts, following up on the October 2020 report of Jeh Johnson, the Special Advisor on Equal Justice in the New York State Courts. The Commission surveys its record of enforcing applicable ethics rules that inveigh against bias and discrimination, and it reminds judges of their obligation to ensure that those who work for or appear before them adhere to the same high standards.

The Commission's Budget

The Commission has been operating on a "flat" budget of \$6,026,000 for two years, which among other things has resulted in a staff reduction based on attrition. As annual costs rise, sacrifices are necessary because the same dollar amount cannot cover all the Commission's expenses. Although authorized or 51 full-time employees, the Commission is now down to 38, its lowest level in years.

³ The Commission notifies such judges that proceedings would resume if they return to the bench.

⁴ The website and Annual Report also report on cases decided by two predecessor commissions, beginning with a legislatively-created temporary commission on judicial conduct in 1975, whose dockets were carried over to the current Commission.

The Senate has proposed a \$330,000 increase (5%) to the Commission’s budget for the fiscal year beginning April 1, 2021, which if approved would help to restore staffing and resources to appropriate levels.

Statement by Commission Chairman Joseph W. Belluck

“Faith in the integrity of the courts is essential to the rule of law. The work of the Judicial Conduct Commission, under difficult pandemic conditions in 2020, helped to promote public confidence in a judiciary that is both independent and accountable, for which I thank our dedicated members and resourceful staff.”

Statement by Commission Administrator Robert H. Tembeckjian

“The Judicial Conduct Commission has had remarkable success in ethics enforcement over the years, due as much to its constitutional independence as to the vigorous commitment of its members and staff. Despite diminished resources, a public health crisis and a large caseload, it has again led the nation in judicial disciplinary results and is a worthy model to be emulated throughout government.”

Office Addresses

The Commission’s offices are located at the following addresses:

61 Broadway
Suite 1200
New York, NY 10006

Corning Tower, Suite 2301
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12223

400 Andrews Street
Suite 700
Rochester, NY 14604

Commission Members

There are 11 members of the Commission on Judicial Conduct. Members, who are appointed by the Governor, Chief Judge and legislative leaders, serve 4-year terms and are eligible for re-appointment.

Joseph W. Belluck, Esq., Chair
Taa Grays, Esq., Vice Chair
Hon. Fernando M. Camacho
Jodie Corngold
Hon. John A. Falk
Paul B. Harding, Esq.

Hon. Leslie G. Leach (to 12/31/20)
Hon. Angela M. Mazzaelli
Hon. Robert J. Miller
Marvin Ray Raskin, Esq.
Ronald J. Rosenberg, Esq.
Akosua Garcia Yeboah