



**BEFORE THE STATE COMMISSION
ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

CJC No. 19-1652

**PUBLIC WARNING
AND
ORDER OF ADDITIONAL EDUCATION**

**HONORABLE URSULA HALL
165TH CIVIL DISTRICT COURT
HOUSTON, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

During its meeting on October 5-7, 2020, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations against the Honorable Ursula Hall, Judge of the 165th Civil District Court, Houston, Harris County, Texas. Judge Hall was advised by letter of the Commission's concerns and provided a written response. Judge Hall appeared before the Commission on October 7, 2020 and gave testimony.

BACKGROUND

Ronald E. Nelsen ("Nelsen") obtained a judgment in the 165th Civil District Court, Houston, Harris County in 2014 against three individuals; Cassandra Eldridge ("Cassandra"); Claude Eldridge, III ("Claude III"); and, Claude Eldridge, IV ("Claude IV"). Nelsen began attempting post-judgment discovery in the case in 2017 and, in 2018, filed motions to compel discovery and for sanctions against each of the three defendants.

Judge Hall allowed oral hearings on Nelsen's first motions regarding Cassandra. Nelsen later set a second Motion to Compel and for Sanctions against Cassandra for oral hearing on October 4, 2018, though he was told by court staff his hearing time for that matter would be limited to 15 minutes. On September 6, 2018 Nelsen received Cassandra's response to his second motion and called the court to confirm the October 4th setting. At that time, he was told by court staff the hearing scheduled for October 4, 2018 was removed from the docket and Judge Hall would not allow further oral hearings in his case.

On September 7, 2018, Nelsen sent a letter to the court requesting clarification regarding his attempts to set his second motion to compel against Cassandra for oral hearing. The letter went

unanswered, so Nelsen set his enforcement motions against Cassandra on the court's submission docket for October 1, 2018. By June 2019, Judge Hall had not ruled on those motions.

Having been told by court staff Judge Hall would no longer allow him oral hearings, Nelsen set his enforcement motions against Claude III on the court's submission docket for September 10, 2018. Despite letters and calls requesting a ruling on those matters, Judge Hall never ruled. Nelsen also filed enforcement motions against Claude IV and set those for submission on October 29, 2018. Despite letters and phone calls requesting rulings, Judge Hall never ruled on those motions either.

On June 20, 2019 Nelsen filed a Motion to Recuse Judge Hall from his case regarding the Eldridges. Nelsen also filed a proposed Notice of Hearing, should Judge Hall decline to recuse, and a proposed Order of Recusal. Judge Hall did not rule or take any action on the motion until September 26, 2019, when she signed and filed an Amended Order of Referral declining to recuse from the case and referring the motion to the Regional Presiding Judge.

After considering the evidence before it, the Commission enters the following Findings and Conclusion set forth below:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At all relevant times, the Honorable Ursula Hall was the Judge of the 165th Civil District Court, Houston, Harris County, Texas.
2. Ronald E. Nelsen, a judgment creditor, filed post-judgment motions for sanctions and motions to compel against each of the judgment debtors in his case, Cassandra Eldridge, Claude Eldridge, III, and Claude Eldridge, IV, beginning in July 2018.
3. After initial oral hearings on his 1st set of post-judgment motions against Cassandra Eldridge, court staff told Nelsen he would not be allowed to schedule further oral hearings.
4. Nelsen set his subsequent motions against each of the Eldridges for submission, but Judge Hall did not rule, even after Nelsen's repeated requests that she do so.
5. On June 20, 2019, Nelsen filed a Motion to Recuse Judge Hall from his case regarding the Eldridges. Judge Hall did not act on the motion until September 26, 2019, when she declined to recuse and forwarded the motion to the Regional Presiding Judge.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

1. Article V, §1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution provides, in relevant part, that a judge may be sanctioned for "...willful or persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of his duties..."
2. Section 33.001(b)(1) of the Texas Government Code provides that "For the purposes of Section 1-a, Article V, Texas Constitution, 'wilful or persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of a judge's duties' includes: (1)wilful, persistent, and unjustifiable failure to timely execute the business of the court, considering the quantity and complexity of the business."
3. Canon 3B(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states: "A judge shall hear and decide matters assigned to the judge except those in which disqualification is required or recusal is appropriate."

4. Canon 3B(8) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states: "A judge shall accord to every person who has a legal interest in a proceeding, or that person's lawyer, the right to be heard according to law."

CONCLUSION


Based upon the record before it and the factual findings recited above, the Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that the Honorable Ursula Hall, Judge of the 165th Civil District Court of Houston, Harris County, Texas should be publicly warned and ordered to obtain additional education for; (i) failing to set, hear, decide, and timely sign orders regarding Mr. Nelsen's post-judgment motions, matters which were assigned to the judge and from which she was neither disqualified nor recused, in violation of Canon 3B(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct and Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution; and, (ii) failing to timely refer Mr. Nelsen's motion to recuse her, in violation of Canon 3B(8) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.

Pursuant to this Order, Judge Hall must obtain **2 hours** of instruction with a mentor, in addition to her required judicial education for Fiscal Year 2021. In particular, the Commission desires that Judge Hall receive this additional education in the area of timely management and administration of the court docket and handling recusal motions. Pursuant to the authority contained in §33.036 of the Texas Government Code, the Commission authorizes the disclosure of certain information relating to this matter to the Texas Center for the Judiciary to the extent necessary to enable that entity to assign the appropriate mentor for Judge Hall.

Judge Hall shall complete the additional **2 hours** of instruction recited above within **60 days** from the date of written notification from the Commission of the assignment of a mentor. Upon receiving such notice, it is Judge Hall's responsibility to contact the assigned mentor and schedule the additional education.

The Commission has taken this action pursuant to the authority conferred it in Article V, §1-a (8) of the Texas Constitution in a continuing effort to promote confidence in and high standards for the judiciary.

Issued this the 28 day of October, 2020.



David Hall
Chairman, State Commission on Judicial Conduct