



**BEFORE THE STATE COMMISSION  
ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

---

**CJC No. 22-0863**

---

**PUBLIC ADMONITION**

**HONORABLE CLARICE WATKINS  
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, PCT. 2  
MARSHALL, HARRISON COUNTY, TEXAS**

During its meeting on October 4, 2023, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations against the Honorable Clarice Watkins, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2, in Marshall, Harrison County, Texas. Judge Watkins was advised by letter of the Commission's concerns and provided a written response.

After considering the evidence before it, the Commission entered the following Findings and Conclusion:

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Honorable Clarice Watkins served as the Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2, in Marshall, Harrison County, Texas.
2. After serving on the bench since 2013, Judge Watkins announced in 2021 that she would not seek another term in office, and she would retire at the end of her term in December 2022.
3. On October 22, 2021, while still the Justice of the Peace, Judge Watkins was interviewed by the *Marshall News Messenger*, the local newspaper, and endorsed Demisha Crawford ("Crawford"), a clerk in her office, for the next Democratic primary election for her Court.
4. On the same day, a Facebook friend of Judge Watkins tagged her on the October 22<sup>nd</sup> article, which then appeared on her personal Facebook page.
5. On October 23, 2021, Judge Watkins then shared the October 22<sup>nd</sup> article on her personal Facebook page.

6. On October 24, 2021, a second article appeared in the *Marshall News Messenger* which was an interview of Crawford. In this article, Judge Watkins' endorsement of Crawford was again mentioned.
7. On January 17, 2022, Judge Watkins appeared with Crawford on an MLK float for Crawford's campaign during an MLK parade. Judge Watkins rode in the truck pulling the float and wore a Crawford Campaign T-Shirt. The parade ended at the Marshall Civic Center, where Judge Watkins walked around and talked to people wearing the campaign t-shirt.
8. In her response to the Commission, Judge Watkins did not dispute the events asserted above but stated, "At the time I was unaware that I could not endorse [Crawford] because no one expressed to me that it would be an issue. In fact, I was aware of other retiring elected officials who have made similar endorsements."
9. Judge Watkins further responded, "I was unaware of Texas Code of Judicial Conduct Canon 5(2). Had I known that endorsing a candidate for public office was a violation, I certainly would not have expressed it publicly."
10. Judge Watkins stated she did take a course in judicial ethics in April 2022 and became aware of the fact that judges cannot endorse political candidates.
11. Judge Watkins stated once she became aware that she could not endorse political candidates, she made every effort to comply with the rules regarding Crawford and political endorsements. However, Judge Watkins did not take any corrective action regarding her endorsement of Crawford on her personal Facebook page since her post of the October 22<sup>nd</sup> article was still posted.
12. Judge Watkins stated that she prided herself on being a person of integrity, honesty and one who follows the Letter of the Law, stating further, "I sincerely apologize for this unfortunate circumstance."

### **RELEVANT STANDARDS**

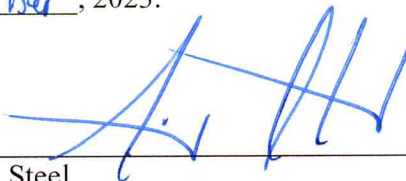
1. Canon 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states, in relevant part, "A judge or judicial candidate shall not authorize the public use of his or her name endorsing another candidate for any public office, except that either may indicate support for a political party."

## 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 Clarice Watkins, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2, in Marshall, Harrison County, Texas should be publicly admonished for authorizing the public use of her name to endorse her clerk as her successor to the bench, in violation of Canon 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.

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

Issued this the 27 day of October, 2023.



---

Gary Steel  
Chairman, State Commission on Judicial Conduct