



**BEFORE THE STATE COMMISSION
ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

CJC Nos. 22-0101, 22-1257 & 23-0821

PUBLIC REPRIMAND

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

During its meeting on April 3-4, 2024, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations in these matters against the Honorable Ursula Hall, judge of the 165th Judicial District Court in Houston, Harris County, Texas. Judge Hall was advised by letter of the Commission's concerns and provided written responses. On April 4, 2024, Judge Hall appeared before the Commission and provided testimony regarding these matters.

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 Ursula Hall was the judge of the 165th Judicial District Court in Houston, Harris County, Texas.
2. On October 28, 2020, the Commission issued to Judge Hall a Public Warning and Order of Additional Education in CJC No. 19-1652 for, in part, failing to set, hear, decide, and timely sign orders.
3. The Commission received the above-referenced complaints against Judge Hall, which combined allege the judge failed to perform the duties of her office in a timely manner with respect to setting, hearing, deciding, and signing orders, the same conduct for which Judge Hall was previously sanctioned.
4. Chief Justice Tracy Christopher of the Fourteenth Court of Appeals in Houston, Texas filed one of the complaints against Judge Hall and stated Judge Hall has demonstrated a recurring pattern of failing to timely rule in cases, which in turn has forced litigants and the appellate courts to expend

unnecessary resources processing mandamus petitions brought to remedy her failure to so timely rule.

5. In her complaint, Chief Justice Christopher referred the Commission to the memorandum opinion issued by the Fourteenth Court of Appeals in *In re Robert Walsh* (Case No. 14-23-00455-CV), a case in which the court conditionally granted a mandamus petition against Judge Hall and directed her to rule on the motion at issue.
6. In the *Walsh* opinion, the Court of Appeals took “judicial notice” of the fact that both the First and Fourteenth Courts of Appeals “have repeatedly been petitioned for mandamus relief against [Judge Hall] for failure to rule,” including more than thirty identified mandamus petitions that “were either granted or dismissed as moot when [Judge Hall] ruled after the petition for writ of mandamus was filed.”
7. In her written responses, Judge Hall denied she neglected her judicial duties or that delays in her rulings constituted judicial misconduct. She acknowledged, “There have been motions pending for longer than they should have been in my court, just as there are motions pending longer than they should be in other courts. Certainly there is a perception among the bar that I am slow to rule, which is enhanced with the recitation of prior petitions in the appellate court memorandum opinions.”¹
8. Judge Hall stated, “I do not deny that the Courts of Appeal have been petitioned for mandamus relief against me alleging failure to rule. Nor do I contest the number of cases. However, I believe that litigants petition for mandamus relief against me when they would not have petitioned against another judge under similar facts. I have a reputation, and each mandamus seems to build off the next.”
9. During her appearance before the Commission, Judge Hall acknowledged being named the respondent in dozens of mandamus petitions makes her unique among her peers in the Harris County District Courts, but suggested the situation was due to circumstances beyond her control.
10. Judge Hall testified the fault for the situation lay, alternatively, with the Harris County District Clerk’s Office, for failing to provide adequate notice of the myriad filings; the attorneys who filed the mandamus petitions, for being too quick to seek appellate relief and for not telling her about their intent to do so beforehand; individuals/groups in the local legal and/or political community who would like to see her removed from the bench, for encouraging attorneys to file mandamus petitions against her; and the appellate courts for granting the mandamus petitions and thus encouraging the filing of more.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

1. Canon 2A of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides that a judge shall comply with the law and should act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.
2. Canon 3B(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides, “A judge shall hear and decide matters assigned to the judge except those in which disqualification is required or recusal is appropriate.”

¹ During her appearance before the Commission, Judge Hall recanted this statement.

3. Canon 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides, in relevant part: “A judge...shall maintain professional competence in [the law].”
4. Section 33.001(b)(1) of the Texas Government Code provides, in relevant part, “For purpose of Section 1-a, Article V, Texas Constitution, ‘willful or persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of a judge’s duties’ includes: (1) willful, persistent, and unjustifiable failure to timely execute the business of the court, considering the quantity and complexity of the business.”
5. Rule 7.2(a) of the Texas Rule of Judicial Administration provides, in relevant part, “A district, statutory county or business court judge must: (a) diligently discharge the administrative responsibilities of the office; ...”
6. Rule 7.2(b) of the Texas Rule of Judicial Administration provides, in relevant part, “A district, statutory county, or business court judge must: ...(b)rule on a case within three months after the case is taken under advisement; ...”
7. Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution provides, in relevant part, that a judge shall not engage in “willful or persistent conduct” that “is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of his duties or casts public discredit upon the judiciary or administration of justice.”

CONCLUSION

Based on 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 Judicial District Court in Houston, Harris County, Texas, should be publicly reprimanded for her failure to: (1) comply with and maintain professional competence in the law; and (2) hear and decide matters assigned to her except those in which disqualification is required or recusal is appropriate, specifically her failure to perform her judicial duties in a timely manner with respect to setting, hearing, deciding, and signing orders in cases filed in her court, in violation of Canons 2A, 3B(1), and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct and Section 33.001(b)(1) of the Texas Government Code. Judge Hall’s failure in these respects constituted willful and persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of her duties and cast public discredit upon the judiciary or the administration of justice, in violation of Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution.

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 protect the public and promote public confidence in the judicial system.

Issued this the 15 day of April, 2024.

Gary Steel

Chairman, State Commission on Judicial Conduct