

STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT



**FISCAL YEAR 2011
ANNUAL REPORT**

STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

FY 2011 ANNUAL REPORT

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Jorge C. Rangel, Chair

Tom Cunningham, Vice Chair

Janelle Shepard, Secretary

Sid Harle

Karry K. Matson

Patti H. Johnson

Joel P. Baker

Edward J. Spillane, III

Steven L. Seider

Martha M. Hernandez

Diane D. Threadgill

M. Sue Kurita

David Gaultney

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COMMISSIONER INFORMATION

OFFICERS

CHAIR

Mr. Jorge C. Rangel

Attorney, Corpus Christi
Appointed by State Bar of Texas
Term Expires: 11/19/2011

VICE-CHAIR

Mr. Tom Cunningham

Attorney, Houston
Appointed by State Bar of Texas
Term Expires: 11/19/2013

SECRETARY

Ms. Janelle Shepard

Public Member, Weatherford
Appointed by Governor
Term Expires: 11/19/2011

MEMBERS

Hon. Sid Harle

District Judge, San Antonio
Appointed by Texas Supreme Court
Term Expires: 11/19/2011

Hon. Steven L. Seider

Justice of the Peace, Dallas
Appointed by Texas Supreme Court
Term Expires: 11/19/2015

Ms. Karry K. Matson

Public Member, Georgetown
Appointed by Governor
Term Expires: 11/19/2013

Ms. Martha M. Hernandez

Public Member, Diboll
Appointed by Governor
Term Expires: 11/19/2015

Ms. Patti H. Johnson

Public Member, Canyon Lake
Appointed by Governor
Term Expires: 11/19/2011

Ms. Diane D. Threadgill

Public Member, Midlothian
Appointed by Governor
Term Expires: 11/19/2015

Hon. Joel P. Baker

County Judge, Tyler
Appointed by Texas Supreme Court
Term Expires: 11/19/2011

Hon. M. Sue Kurita

County Court at Law Judge, El Paso
Appointed by Texas Supreme Court
Term Expires: 11/19/2015

Hon. Edward J. Spillane III

Municipal Court Judge, College Station
Appointed by Texas Supreme Court
Term Expires: 11/19/2015

Hon. David Gaultney

Appellate Justice, Beaumont
Appointed by Texas Supreme Court
Term Expires: 11/19/2013

STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

COMMISSION STAFF

Seana Willing, Executive Director

Bob Warneke, General Counsel

Jacqueline Habersham, Senior Commission Counsel

Cathy Bradford, Senior Commission Counsel

Patrick Summers, Commission Counsel

Nahdiah Hoang, Commission Counsel

Ron Bennett, Chief Investigator

Victor Hidalgo, Senior Investigator

Katherine Mitchell, Senior Investigator

Judy Morgan, Legal Assistant/Intake

John Brown, Staff Services Officer

Connie Paredes, Administrative Assistant

Juanita Villarreal, Administrative Assistant

Felisa Wilson, Administrative Assistant

Statement From The Chair

The mission of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct is “to protect the public, promote public confidence in the integrity, independence, competence, and impartiality of the judiciary, and encourage judges to maintain high standards of conduct both on and off the bench.” As I complete my service as a member and Chair of the Commission, I leave knowing that the public is being well served by the Commission, because the work of the Commission is in the hands of dedicated Commissioners and staff members who are deeply committed to carrying out the mission of the Commission.

As reflected in the statistical information that accompanies this report, the Commission receives many complaints against Texas judges every year. Each complaint is evaluated and disposed of on its merits. Every effort is made to ensure that both the complainant and the judge in question are treated fairly throughout the process. This is consistent with the tremendous responsibility that accompanies the work of the Commission. Public confidence in the integrity and independence of our judiciary is essential to our system of justice. The Commission seeks to promote both the integrity and independence of the judiciary by fairly and expeditiously disposing of complaints that are filed with the Commission. To protect the public, the Commission takes appropriate disciplinary action against a judge when justified by the facts and applicable law. Similarly, to protect judges against unfounded complaints, the Commission dismisses complaints which are without basis in fact or in law. To do otherwise would undermine the public’s confidence in both the integrity and independence of the judiciary.

In carrying out its work, the Commission is mindful that, as stated in the preamble to the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, “our legal system is based on the principle that an independent, fair

and competent judiciary will interpret and apply the laws that govern us.” Having spent many hours in deliberations with Commissioners during my service on the Commission, I know that the Commission is doing its part to ensure that the public will continue to be served by an “independent, fair and competent judiciary.”

It has been my distinct honor and privilege to have served on the Commission for the past six years. I am thankful to the State Bar of Texas for having given me the opportunity to do so. I am also thankful to the Supreme Court of Texas, the Governor of Texas and the Texas Senate for their respective roles in appointing the members of the Commission with whom I have had the honor and privilege of serving. My fellow Commissioners have rendered a tremendous public service for the benefit of all citizens of the State of Texas.



Jorge C. Rangel, Chair
State Commission on Judicial Conduct

PHILOSOPHY

The members of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct and Commission staff take their duties to the citizens and judges of Texas very seriously. Neither the political affiliation, gender, ethnic or religious background, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, geographical location, nor the position of a complainant or a judge are considered in the review of cases pending before the Commission. The Commission's ability to fulfill its constitutional mandate requires that each Commissioner and staff member act with honesty, fairness, professionalism and diligence.

The Commission reviews every allegation of misconduct made against a Texas judge. Each complaint alleging misconduct on its face is thoroughly investigated and analyzed by Commission staff before being presented to the Commissioners. This procedure is an essential safeguard to preserve the public's confidence in the integrity of the judicial process. Judges are held to the highest standards of ethical conduct, both on and off the bench, and the Commission and its employees strive to conduct themselves in a similar manner.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION

Authority of the Commission

The State Commission on Judicial Conduct was created in 1965 by an amendment to Article V of the Texas Constitution. The Commission is the independent judicial branch agency responsible for investigating allegations of judicial misconduct or permanent disability, and for disciplining judges.

The Commission's jurisdiction includes all sitting Texas judges, including municipal judges, justices of the peace, criminal magistrates, county judges, county courts-at-law judges, statutory probate judges, district judges, appellate judges, masters, associate judges, referees, retired and former judges who consent to sit by assignment, and judges *pro tempore*. The Commission has no jurisdiction over federal judges and magistrates, administrative hearing officers for state agencies or the State Office of Administrative Hearings, or private mediators or arbitrators. Although judicial candidates are required to comply with the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, the Commission does not have the authority to sanction anyone who was not a sitting judge at the time an offense occurred. Therefore, violations of the canons by candidates for judicial office who were not judges at the time of the alleged misconduct are subject to review and appropriate action by other authorities such as the State Bar, the Attorney General, the Secretary of State, or the local District Attorney.

Members of the Commission

There are thirteen members of the Commission, serving staggered six-year terms, as follows:

- Six judges appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas, one from each of the following court levels: appellate, district, county court-at-law, constitutional county, justice of the peace and municipal,
- Five citizen members who are neither attorneys nor judges, appointed by the Governor, and
- Two attorneys who are not judges, appointed by the State Bar of Texas.

By law, the appellate, district, constitutional and statutory county judges and the two attorney members who serve on the Commission must be appointed from different appellate districts in Texas; the justice of the peace, municipal court judge and public members are selected at-large. The Texas Senate confirms all appointees. Commissioners meet approximately six times each year and receive no pay for their service.

Laws Governing the Commission

The Commission is governed by Article V, Section 1-a, of the Texas Constitution, Chapter 33 of the Texas Government Code, the Texas Procedural Rules for the Removal or Retirement of Judges, and the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct. As part of the judicial branch and as an entity having its own constitutional and statutory provisions regarding

confidentiality of papers, records and proceedings, the Commission is not governed by the Texas Public Information Act, the Open Meetings Act or the Texas Administrative Procedures Act.

Defining Judicial Misconduct

Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution defines judicial misconduct as the “willful or persistent violation of rules promulgated by the Supreme Court of Texas, incompetence in performing the duties of the office, willful violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct, or 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.”

Judicial misconduct could arise from a violation of the Texas Constitution, the Texas Penal Code, the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, or rules promulgated by the Supreme Court of Texas. It could occur through the judge’s failure to cooperate with the Commission. Other examples of judicial misconduct include inappropriate or demeaning courtroom conduct, such as yelling, profanity, gender bias or racial slurs. It could be improper *ex parte* communications with only one of the parties or attorneys in a case, a public comment regarding a pending case, or a refusal by a judge to recuse or disqualify in a case where the judge has an interest in the outcome. It could involve ruling in a case in which the parties, attorneys or appointees are related within a prohibited degree of kinship to the judge. Judicial misconduct could occur through a judge’s failure to cooperate with respect to his or her obligations arising from a Commission inquiry, or failure to abide by any provision of a voluntary agreement to resign in lieu of disciplinary action.

Judicial misconduct could also arise from out-of-court activities, including theft, driving while intoxicated, improper financial or business dealings, sexual harassment or official oppression, and is subject to the same review by the Commission.

Sources of Complaints and Allegations

The Commission has the duty to consider allegations from any source, including an individual, a news article or information received in the course of an investigation. Complaints may be made anonymously, or the complainant may request confidentiality; however, in those instances, the Commission may be restricted in its ability to fully investigate the allegations.

Commission Limitations

The Commission cannot exercise appellate review over a case or change the decision or ruling of any court, nor can the Commission intervene in a pending case or proceeding. For example, if the Commission finds that a judge has committed misconduct, the Commission can only issue sanctions against the judge or seek the judge’s removal from the bench. However, even removal would not change the judge’s ruling in the underlying case. Only the appellate process is empowered to change the decision of a court.

Likewise, the Commission cannot provide individual legal assistance or advice to a complainant. The Commission cannot remove a judge from a case. The Commission cannot award damages or provide monetary relief to complainants.

Commission Investigations and Actions

Cases are reviewed, analyzed and investigated by the Commission staff. An investigation may include a letter of inquiry to the judge, a review of court records, or interviews with the complainant, attorneys and other witnesses. The Commission then considers the results of the investigation in its decision. The Commission has several options available when deciding whether to take action on a case. The types of actions include dismissal, sanction, suspension, acceptance of a voluntary agreement to resign from judicial office in lieu of disciplinary action, and formal proceedings.

Commission Organization and Staff

In fiscal year 2011, the Commission had fourteen (14) authorized staff positions (FTEs). Commission staff includes the Executive Director, the General Counsel, four staff attorneys, three investigators, one legal assistant, a staff services officer, and three administrative assistants. All Commission staff members are full-time State employees.

The Commission's legal staff, which consists of attorneys, investigators, and the legal assistant, is responsible for the evaluation and investigation of complaints. The legal assistant screens all new cases. The investigators handle in-house and on-site investigations. The legal assistant is also responsible for performing legal research, preparing legal documents, and assisting the attorneys in the prosecution of disciplinary proceedings. The attorneys are responsible for responding to ethics calls, speaking on judicial ethics at educational/training seminars, investigating allegations of judicial misconduct or incapacity, and prosecuting disciplinary cases before the Commission, the Texas Supreme Court and its appointees.

The Commission staff attorneys serve as examiners, or trial counsel, during formal proceedings and on appeals from Commission actions. The Examiner is responsible for preparing cases for hearing and presenting the evidence that supports the charges before the Commission, a special master, a special court of review or a review tribunal. The Examiner handles briefing regarding special masters' reports, and presents cases orally and in writing in hearings before the Commission and appointees of the Texas Supreme Court. In many cases, the Commission employs Special Counsel, chosen from distinguished members of the bar, to assist staff in preparing and presenting these cases. Attorneys from the Office of the Attorney General have also represented the Commission as Special Counsel in formal proceedings.

The Executive Director heads the agency and reports directly to the Commission. The Executive Director is also the primary liaison between the Commission and the judiciary, legislators, other government officials, the public and the media.

Amicus Curiae

Started in 2001, *Amicus Curiae* ("Amicus") is a judicial disciplinary and education program intended to address a growing concern, often generated by scandals reported by the media, of judicial misconduct caused by impairment. Before the Commission started this program, complaints of judicial misconduct relating to impairment, such as drug or alcohol abuse or mental illness, were sanctioned or dismissed if unfounded. The underlying impairment was never addressed. *Amicus* affords a third option under the Commission's authority to order additional training and education to a judge found to have violated a canon of judicial conduct. *Amicus* offers assistance to the judge to address the underlying personal impairment causally connected to the misconduct. One advantage *Amicus* offers over other

similar programs such as the Texas Lawyers Assistance Program operated by the State Bar of Texas is its ability to assist all judges, attorney and non-attorney alike.

Although the confidential referral to *Amicus* by the Commission through the disciplinary process does not shield the judge from any sanction that the Commission deems appropriate, the Commission recognizes that not all impairment issues result in misconduct. In order to reach out to those judges who may be suffering in silence and who may not be the subject of a complaint as a result of their impairment, *Amicus* offers a self-referral component to its program, which affords judges an opportunity to seek assistance, in confidence, outside the disciplinary process.

Outreach and Education

In fiscal year 2011, the Executive Director, staff attorneys, investigators, and legal assistant participated in over forty (40) presentations at judicial training courses, bar conferences, court staff workshops, and before several groups of foreign dignitaries and delegates, describing the Commission and its operations and discussing various forms of judicial misconduct.

Ethics Calls

In fiscal year 2011, the Executive Director, staff attorneys and investigators answered approximately 1,400 telephone calls from judges, judicial candidates, attorneys, legislators, the media and citizens regarding judicial ethics inquiries. Callers are cautioned that Commission staff cannot issue an opinion on behalf of the Commission, and that the Commission is not bound by any comments made during the conversation. In many cases, the caller's question is researched before the call is returned so that the specific canon, statute, rule or ethics opinion can be identified. When appropriate, staff will send the caller a Complaint Form (in English or Spanish) and other relevant material. In some instances, staff may refer callers to other resources or agencies to better address their concerns.

Commission Website

The Commission's website, which is maintained by the State Office of Court Administration, is located at www.scjc.texas.gov. The website provides downloadable complaint forms in English and Spanish. The website also offers bilingual answers to frequently-asked questions regarding the Commission, such as its composition, structure and jurisdiction; the judicial complaint process; a description of the range of decisions the Commission can make, from dismissal to sanction; and explanations of the procedures for a judge to appeal the Commission's decision, and for a complainant to seek the Commission's reconsideration. Further, the website provides statistical information about the Commission and updated sanctions, resignations, suspensions, and Review Tribunal Opinions.

Also included are the Commission's governing provisions: The Texas Code of Judicial Conduct; Article V, Section 1-a of the Texas Constitution; Chapter 33 of the Texas Government Code; and the Texas Procedural Rules for the Removal or Retirement of Judges.

Public Information

The availability of information and records maintained by the Commission is governed by Rule 12 of the Texas Rules of Judicial Administration, the Texas Constitution and the Texas Government Code. Commission records are not subject to

public disclosure pursuant to the Public Information Act (formerly the Open Records Act) or the Freedom of Information Act.

Generally, Commission records are confidential, with the following exceptions:

- Constitution: Article V, Section 1-a(10) of the Texas Constitution provides that “All papers filed with and proceedings before the Commission or a Master shall be confidential, unless otherwise provided by the law...”
- Government Code:
 - In the event the Commission issues a public sanction against a judge, Section 33.032 of the Texas Government Code provides for the release of information previously withheld as confidential.
 - Also under this Section, suspension orders and related proceedings as well as voluntary agreements to resign in lieu of disciplinary proceedings are available to the public.
 - Section 33.032 also authorizes the release to the public of papers filed in a formal proceeding upon the filing of formal charges.
- Judicial Administration: Rule 12 of the Texas Rules of Judicial Administration provides for public access to certain records made or maintained by a judicial agency in its regular course of business *but not pertaining to its adjudicative function*. Commission records relating to complaints, investigations, and its proceedings are not judicial records and are not subject to public disclosure pursuant to Rule 12.

When the Commission takes action on a complaint, whether dismissing it, issuing a private or public sanction, accepting a voluntary agreement to resign in lieu of disciplinary action, or voting formal proceedings, the complainant is notified in writing. However, the Texas Government Code requires that the Commission omit the judge’s name from the notice to the complainant, unless a public sanction has been issued. The complainant has some privacy rights as well: at the complainant’s request, his or her name may be withheld from the judge and kept confidential.

Additionally, the Constitution provides that in instances where issues concerning either a judge or the Commission have been made public by sources other than the Commission, the Commission may make a public statement. In such a situation, the Commission determines whether the best interests of a judge or the public will be served by issuing the statement.

THE COMPLAINT PROCESS

Introduction

Each complaint stating an allegation of judicial misconduct is thoroughly reviewed, investigated and analyzed by the Commission staff. Complaints must be filed with the Commission in writing. Complaints sent by fax or through e-mail are not accepted.

Although it is not mandatory that a complainant submit his or her allegation on the Commission's complaint form, the specific information sought is essential to the efficient handling of a complaint. Complaint forms are available in English and Spanish from the following sources:

- Download from the Commission's website at www.scjc.texas.gov; and
- Telephone requests to the Commission at (512) 463-5533.

The Commission may also initiate the complaint process itself upon a review of information from the media, court documents, the Internet or other sources. The complainant may request that the Commission keep his or her identity confidential, and anonymous complaints are also accepted.

When a complaint is filed, the Commission sends the complainant an acknowledgment letter and staff begins its investigation and analysis of the allegations. The complainant may be asked to provide additional information or documents. Staff then reviews each allegation or complaint thoroughly. In some cases, legal research may be conducted, and witnesses or the judge may be contacted. For complex matters, an attorney or investigator may travel to the judge's county for further investigation and interviews.

When the investigation is completed, the case is presented to the Commission for its consideration. In some cases, the Commission may invite the judge to appear and discuss the complainant's allegations; under certain circumstances, the Commission may invite the complainant to appear. Based on the specific constitutional provisions, statutes and canons under which the Commission operates, it considers and votes on each matter on a case-by-case basis.

If the Commission votes to issue a public sanction, the appropriate order is prepared and distributed to the subject judge and the complainant; the order is then publicly disseminated as required by law to ensure public awareness. If, however, the Commission votes to issue a private sanction, the appropriate order is prepared and tendered to the subject judge, and the complainant is notified by letter of the Commission's action. Because the Commission is controlled by constitutional and statutory provisions that prohibit the release of information regarding investigation and resolution of a case, no other details will be released to the public. However, in cases where a judge has voluntarily agreed to resign in lieu of disciplinary action, that agreement becomes public upon the Commission's acceptance of it, and the complainant is so notified.

Likewise, whenever the Commission suspends a judge after he or she has been indicted for a criminal offense, or charged with a misdemeanor involving official misconduct,

the Commission releases to the public the order of suspension and all records related to the proceedings.

Commission Decisions

Commission members review, deliberate and vote on each complaint. This may result in a dismissal, a public or private order of additional education either alone or in combination with a public or private sanction, a public or private admonition, warning or reprimand, the acceptance of a voluntary agreement to resign from judicial office in lieu of disciplinary action, or formal proceedings for removal or retirement of the judge from the bench. If appropriate, the Commission may defer its action and refer the judge to the *Amicus Curiae* Program. If the judge appeals a decision of the Commission, the Texas Supreme Court appoints three appellate judges to serve as a Special Court of Review. That Court's final decision-making authority includes dismissal, affirmation of the Commission decision, imposition of a greater or lesser sanction, or the initiation of formal proceedings. The decision of the Special Court of Review is final and may not be appealed.

The Commission's decisions and actions in responding to allegations or complaints of judicial misconduct fall into one of the following categories:

1. Administrative Dismissal Report

A case is dismissed administratively when a complainant's writing fails to state an allegation that, if true, would constitute one or more of the following: (a) a willful or persistent violation of rules promulgated by the Supreme Court of Texas, (b) incompetence in performing the duties of the office, (c) willful violation of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, or (d) 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. Generally, the fact that a judge made an error while ruling on a motion or an objection, or otherwise deciding a case, does not constitute judicial misconduct unless there is a showing of bad faith, persistent legal error, or the legal error was egregious. In fact, only an appellate court has the power to review and change a judge's decision in any case. In addition, gratuitous claims of misconduct that are unsupported by any facts or evidence may be administratively dismissed. These cases, which are reviewed by the Commission, are dismissed without a full investigation. In letters of dismissal sent to these complainants, the Commission provides a specific explanation for the decision.

2. Dismissal

The Commission may dismiss a case after conducting a review and investigation of the allegations. Reasons for these dismissals include insufficient or no evidence of misconduct, the judge demonstrated that he or she took appropriate actions to correct the conduct at issue, or the conduct, though problematic, did not rise to the level of sanctionable misconduct. In letters of dismissal sent to these complainants, the Commission provides a specific explanation for the dismissal, and describes the steps the complainant may take for the Commission to reconsider its decision. The Commission may also include cautionary advice to judges whose complaints have been dismissed after the judge has taken appropriate corrective action or in those cases where disciplinary action was deemed unwarranted given the facts and circumstances surrounding the infraction.

3. Order of Additional Education

Legal and procedural issues are often complex, so it is not surprising that some judges, particularly non-lawyer judges, take judicial action that may exceed their authority or that is contrary to procedural rules. In these situations, the Commission may find that the judge has demonstrated a deficiency in a particular area of the law warranting an order of education. The Commission then contacts the appropriate judicial training center, where the subject judge may attend a particular training program or a mentor judge may be appointed for one-on-one instruction with the subject judge, to be completed within a specified time on particular subjects. The mentor judge then reports to the Commission on the subject judge's progress. The Commission may also order the judge to obtain education on other issues, such as anger management, gender or racial sensitivity, or sexual harassment. The Commission may issue an order of education alone or as part of a private or public sanction.

4. Private or Public Sanction

Sanctions are issued by the Commission when sufficient evidence is provided that supports a finding of judicial misconduct. The most severe disciplinary action available to the Commission is a *public censure*, issued only after a case has been voted into formal proceedings by the Commission. If, after a public fact-finding trial, the Commission determines that the underlying allegations of the complaint are true but do not support a recommendation for removal from office, a *censure* is issued as a public denunciation of the judge's conduct.

The next most severe sanction is a *public reprimand*. A *reprimand* is the most severe sanction available to the Commission (unless formal proceedings are voted as described herein). A less severe sanction is a *public warning*, followed by a *public admonition*. A *warning* puts the judge on notice that the actions identified in the sanction are improper. An *admonition* is the lowest level sanction. As noted above, sanctions may be public or private, and may be combined with orders of education.

A judge may appeal any sanction and a public censure to a Special Court of Review. The process for appealing a public censure issued by the Commission after formal proceedings is different than that of a *de novo* review of a sanction issued after informal proceedings. The Texas Supreme Court has been charged with the responsibility of promulgating the written procedures for the appeal of a public censure.

If a *public sanction* or *censure* is issued, all information considered by the Commission, including the judge's name, is made public. Public sanctions are issued not only to identify the specific conduct, but to educate judges that such conduct is inappropriate. This also ensures that the public is made aware of actions that violate the Code of Judicial Conduct. When a *private sanction* is voted, the judge's name and all information considered by the Commission are kept confidential.

5. Suspension

The Commission has the power to suspend a judge from sitting on the bench, with or without pay, after the judge has been either indicted by a grand jury for a felony, or charged with a misdemeanor involving official misconduct. The suspended judge has the right to a post-suspension hearing before one or more of the Commission members or the Executive Director, as designated by the Commission Chair.

In cases other than for alleged criminal behavior, the Commission, upon the filing of a sworn complaint and after giving the judge notice and an opportunity to appear before the Commission, may recommend to the Supreme Court of Texas that the judge be suspended from office, for persistent violation of rules promulgated by the Supreme Court, incompetence in performing the duties of office, willful violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct, or willful and persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of his or her duties, or that casts public discredit on the judiciary or the administration of justice.

6. Voluntary Agreement to Resign

In some cases, a judge against whom a complaint has been made may decide to resign in lieu of disciplinary action. In that event, the judge may tender to the Commission a voluntary agreement to resign from judicial office. Upon the Commission's acceptance, the agreement is made public and the judge vacates the bench. The agreement and any agreed statement of facts relating to it are admissible in subsequent proceedings before the Commission. While the agreement is public, any records relating to the underlying case remain confidential and may only be released to the public if a judge violates a term of the agreement.

7. Formal Proceedings

In certain circumstances, the Commission may decide that a complaint against a judge is so severe that it should be handled as a formal proceeding. The Commission itself may conduct such a fact-finding hearing or it may ask the Supreme Court of Texas to appoint a Special Master (who must be a sitting or retired district or appellate judge) to hear the matter. Such proceedings are governed by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and the Texas Rules of Evidence to the extent practicable.

Although there is no right to a trial by jury in a formal proceeding, the judge is afforded certain other rights under the Texas Procedural Rules for the Removal or Retirement of Judges, including the following:

- To be confronted by the judge's accusers;
- To introduce evidence;
- To be represented by counsel;
- To examine and cross-examine witnesses;
- To subpoena witnesses; and
- To obtain a copy of the reporter's record of testimony.

If the formal proceeding has been conducted before a Special Master, he or she reports the findings of fact to the Commission. If either party files objections to the Master's Report, the Commission will hold a public hearing to consider the report of the Special Master and any objections. The Commission may adopt the Special Master's findings in whole or in part, modify the findings, totally reject them and enter its own findings, or order a hearing for the taking of additional evidence.

After adopting findings of fact, the Commission issues its conclusions of law. The Commission may dismiss the case, issue a public censure, or recommend removal or involuntary retirement to a seven-member Review Tribunal appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas. The Commission itself cannot remove a judge; only the Review Tribunal can order a

judge removed from the bench. The Review Tribunal may also enter an order prohibiting the judge from ever holding a judicial office again.

Although the Commission's recommendation for removal cannot be appealed, the judge may appeal the decision of the Review Tribunal to the Texas Supreme Court. A judge may also appeal the Commission's decision to issue a public censure to a Special Court of Review.

Appellate Review of Commission Action

A judge may appeal the Commission's issuance of any public or private sanction, order of additional education, or public censure¹ within thirty (30) days of the date the Commission issues the sanction by filing a written notice with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas and requesting the appointment of three appellate justices to act as a Special Court of Review.

Within fifteen (15) days after the Special Court of Review is appointed, the Commission, through its Examiner, must file with the Clerk a "charging document," which includes a copy of the sanction issued, as well as any additional charges to be considered in the *de novo* proceeding. These records become public upon filing with the Clerk, who is responsible for furnishing a copy to the subject judge and to each justice on the Special Court of Review.

A trial *de novo* is held within thirty (30) days after the charging document is filed. The Special Court of Review considers the case from the beginning, as if the Commission had taken no previous action. The Texas Rules of Civil Procedure apply, except that the judge is not entitled to a jury trial. All documents filed and evidence received in the review process are public.

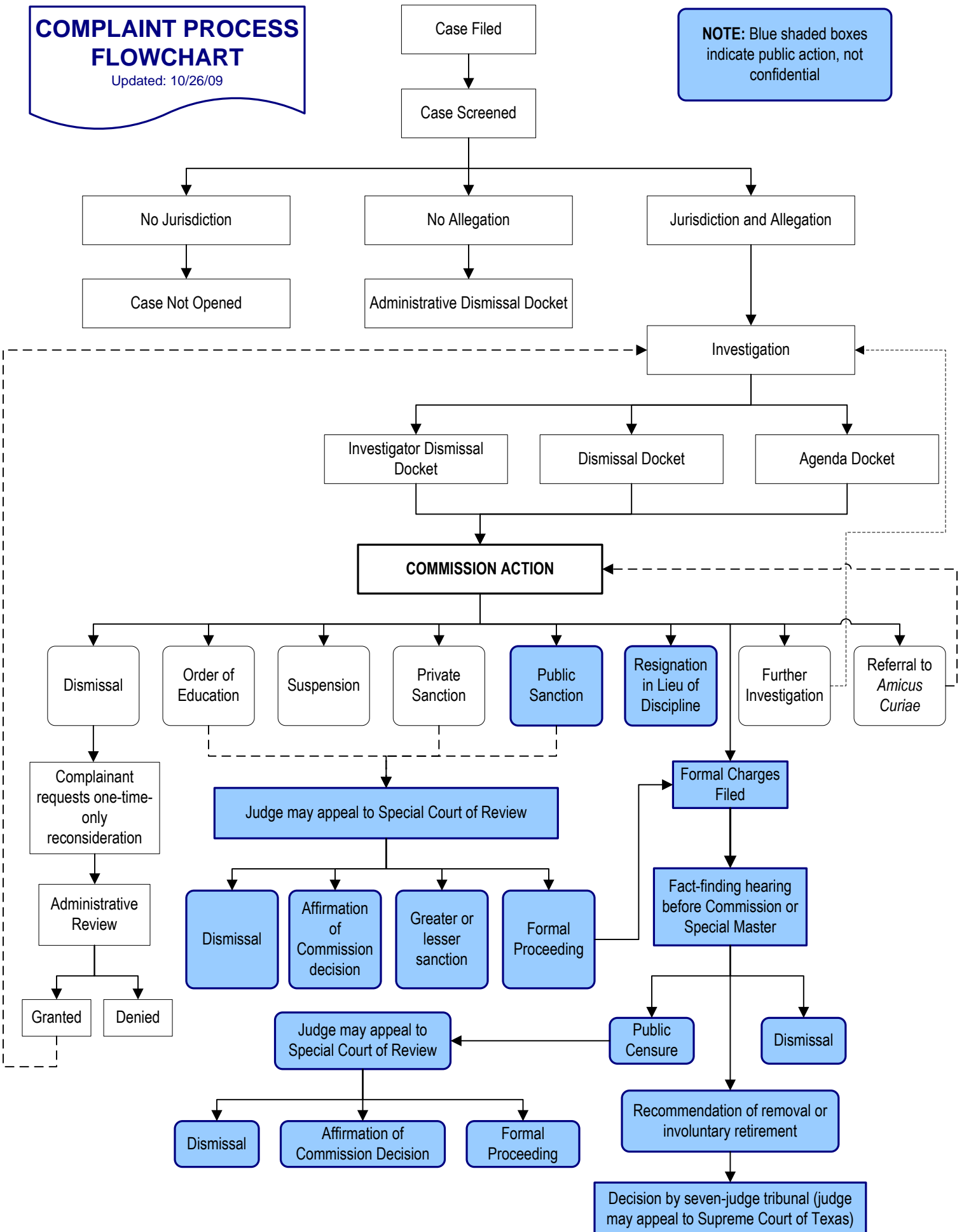
The Special Court of Review may dismiss or affirm the Commission's decision, impose a greater or lesser sanction, or order the Commission to file formal proceedings against the subject judge for removal or involuntary retirement. The decision of the Special Court of Review is final and cannot be appealed.

¹ The 81st Legislature amended Section 33.034 of the Texas Government Code to provide judges the right to appeal a public censure issued by the Commission following a formal proceeding. The Texas Supreme Court has been charged with the responsibility of drafting the procedural rules that will govern this process. As of the date of this publication, however, no written procedures are in place for such an appeal.

COMPLAINT PROCESS FLOWCHART

Updated: 10/26/09

NOTE: Blue shaded boxes indicate public action, not confidential



AMICUS CURIAE PROGRAM

The *Amicus Curiae* program (“*Amicus*” herein), developed in 2001, continues to identify and assist members of the judiciary who have impairments by providing a confidential resource for those judges to obtain help.

Amicus Curiae, which translates as “friend of the court,” grew out of the Commission’s awareness and concern that certain issues of misconduct resulted from underlying problems related to alcohol or drug abuse, addiction, mental or emotional disorders, and certain physical illnesses or disabilities. Unlike most employee assistance programs, *Amicus* is unique in that it is not designed to provide direct services. Instead, *Amicus* helps locate resources to identify and treat impairments that may be affecting those judges’ personal lives and their performance on the bench.

The Commission would like to recognize the following distinguished professionals who assisted in overseeing the development and early operation of the *Amicus* program:

- Justice Robert Seerden, Corpus Christi, is the retired Chief Justice of the 13th Court of Appeals; he is of counsel at Hermansen, McKibben, Woolsey & Villarreal, L.L.P. in Corpus Christi;
- Dr. Lawrence Schoenfeld, Ph.D, San Antonio, is Director of both the Clinical Psychology Residency and Fellow Programs at the University of Texas at San Antonio Health Sciences Center, and
- Judge Bonnie Crane Hellums, Houston, is Judge of the 247th District Court. Judge Hellums hears family law cases and has initiated one of Houston’s first Drug Courts to deal with some of the impairment issues she routinely sees in her court.

Funding for *Amicus* was initially provided through a grant from the Texas Center for the Judiciary, through the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The Texas Legislature initially appropriated funds to *Amicus* on September 1, 2001. Those funds enabled the Commission to hire a program manager to operate *Amicus* with the Board’s oversight. Developing program guidelines, acquiring educational reference materials, instituting a network of mentor judges, and reviewing similar programs for other professions are the continuing goals of the board. The funding for the program in fiscal year 2005 came from an interagency contract with the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. That contract and funding expired on August 31, 2005. Due to budgetary restraints, no funds have been available for the *Amicus* program since September 1, 2005.

A judge whose conduct has been brought to the attention of the Commission through the filing of a complaint may be offered the opportunity to participate in *Amicus* once the Commission makes a determination that the judge might benefit from such participation. In the event that the Commission should make such a referral, the judge’s participation in *Amicus* remains contingent upon the judge’s voluntary submission to the

program and the judge's acceptance into the program by the *Amicus* Board following an appropriate evaluation. At the discretion of the Commission, discipline of the judge may be temporarily diverted while the judge is an *Amicus* participant. A judge's progress while in the program is regularly reported to the Commission. However, any judge may independently contact the *Amicus* Program directly and request confidential assistance outside the Commission's disciplinary process.

The Commission's major consideration in whether a judge should be referred to *Amicus* for evaluation is whether the public can be assured that all judges maintain the high standards of conduct required of them by the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct and Texas Constitution.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

An outline of the statistical activity for the Commission through the end of fiscal year 2011 is shown in **Table 1** immediately following this section. Graphic representations of the data are also presented in **Figures 1** through **7** to further illustrate the activities of the Commission.

In fiscal year 2011, according to Office of Court Administration records, approximately 3,900 judges were under the jurisdiction of the Commission. **Figure 1** illustrates the Texas judiciary by the total number of judges and by the number of judges in each category. **Figure 2** shows the number and percentage of cases filed with the Commission against each judge type. **Figure 3** shows the number and percentage of disciplinary actions taken by the Commission against each judge type. It should be noted that in fiscal year 2011: justices of the peace received 19% of the complaints filed, but accounted for 55% of all discipline issued by the Commission, a fairly significant increase over fiscal year 2010. Disciplinary actions against district and appellate judges experienced a sharp decline to 7% and 0% respectively. Municipal court judges received 9% of the complaints filed in fiscal year 2011 and accounted for 24% of all discipline issued by the Commission in fiscal year 2011. Consistent with prior years, 44% of all cases filed in fiscal year 2011 were against district judges.

Figure 4 illustrates by number and percentage the various sources of cases closed in fiscal year 2011. By the end of the year 1,192 cases had been disposed. Fifty-four percent (54%) of those cases were filed by civil litigants, their friends or family members, or by *pro se* (self-represented) litigants. Criminal defendants, including traffic defendants and inmates, accounted for approximately 33% of the cases. Three percent (3%) of the cases were filed anonymously and only 5 cases (0%) were Commission-initiated. **Figures 5a** and **5b** compare the number of cases filed with the number of cases disposed for fiscal years 2008 through 2011.

Last year, 42 disciplinary actions were taken against Texas judges. The Commission disposed of 34 cases through public sanction, private sanction, orders of additional education or a combination of a sanction with an order of additional education. In addition, five (5) cases were disposed of through voluntary agreements to resign from office. Interim actions, such as suspensions, *Amicus* referrals, and formal proceedings, accounted for three (3) of the disciplinary actions taken in fiscal year 2011. Additionally, 38 cases were resolved with a letter of caution to the judge and 13 cases were resolved after the judge took appropriate measures to correct the conduct that led to the filing of a complaint. A comparison of public discipline, private discipline and interim actions taken by the Commission in fiscal years 2008 through 2011 is shown in **Figures 6a** and **6b**.

Finally, of the 1,192 cases closed last year, approximately 51% alleged no judicial misconduct. Approximately 28% were dismissed after a preliminary investigation and approximately 21% were disposed of following a full investigation requiring a response from the judge. A comparison of initial, preliminary and full investigations conducted by the Commission in fiscal years 2008 through 2011 is shown in **Figures 7a** and **7b**.

Table 1: Commission Activity

	FISCAL YEAR 2008	FISCAL YEAR 2009	FISCAL YEAR 2010	FISCAL YEAR 2011
Cases Pending (Beginning FY/Ending FY)	385/406	406/445	445/503	503/430
Cases Filed	1049	1204	1280	1119
Total Number Of Cases Disposed	1006	1110	1290	1192
% of Cases Disposed	96%	92.1%	100.7%	106.5%
Average Age of Cases Disposed	4.7 Months	6.19 Months	5.35 Months	5.66 Months
Disciplinary Action (total)	56	70	89	42
Cases Disposed through:				
Criminal Conviction	0	0	0	0
Review Tribunal Order	0	0	0	0
Voluntarily Agreement to Resign in Lieu of Disciplinary Action	1	2	10	5
Sanction:				
Public Censure	0	0	0	0
Public Censure and Order of Additional Education	0	0	0	0
Public Reprimand	0	11	1	1
Public Warning	1	5	18*	2
Public Admonition	6	2	10	3
Public sanction and Order of Additional Education	4	2	6	1
Private Reprimand	2	0	2	3
Private Warning	6	4	3	3
Private Admonition	6	6	19	8
Private sanction and Order of Additional Education	6	6	6	12
Public Order of Additional Education	0	0	0	0
Private Order of Additional Education	8	9	7	1
Interim Disciplinary Action:				
Order of Suspension [15(a)]	4	4	6	3
Recommendation of Suspension to Supreme Court [15(b)]	0	0	0	0
Cases in Formal Proceedings	12	19	0	0
Amicus Referral	0	0	1	0
Dismissals	966	1063	1208	1154
Requests for Reconsideration Received	43	53	106	226
Reconsideration Granted	8	1	0	0
Reconsideration Denied	35	47	104	226
Pending	0	5	2	0
Cases Appealed to Special Court of Review	5	2	16	0
Informal Hearings Set	31	25	21	13 (Includes Aug. 2011 Meeting.)
Public Statements Issued	1	0	0	0

**Total dispositions and disciplinary action totals include a Public Warning issued by the Commission in 16 cases at the conclusion of Formal Proceedings. In October 2010, on appeal to a Special Court of Review appointed by the Texas Supreme Court, the Public Warning in those 16 cases was dismissed.*

Fig. 1 Total Number of Texas Judges*

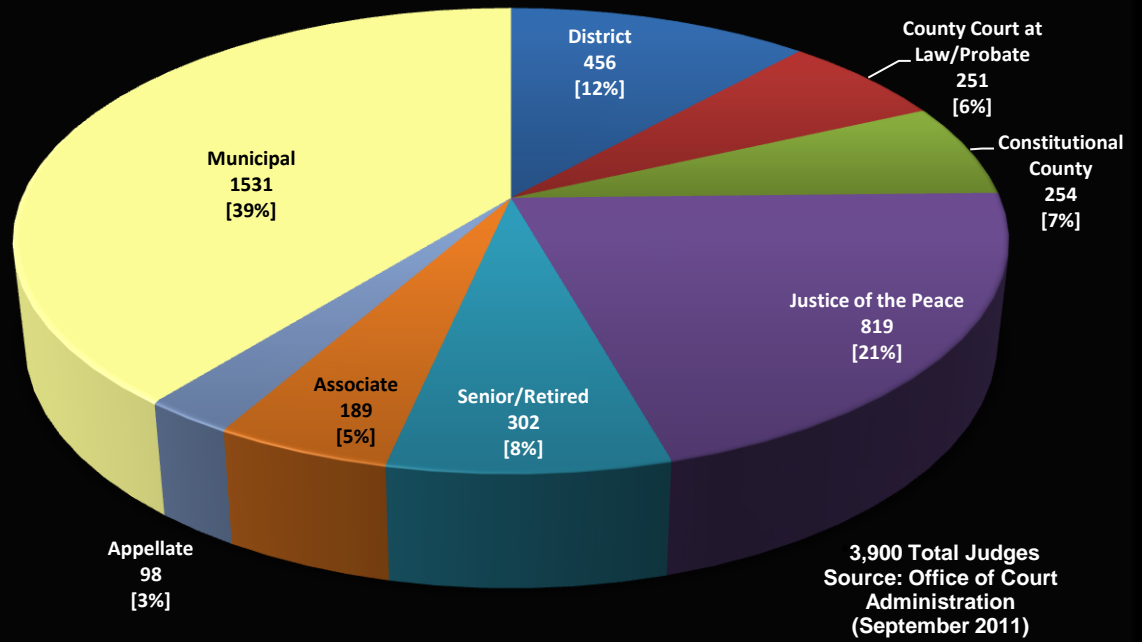


Fig. 2 Number and Percentage of Cases filed by Judge Type*

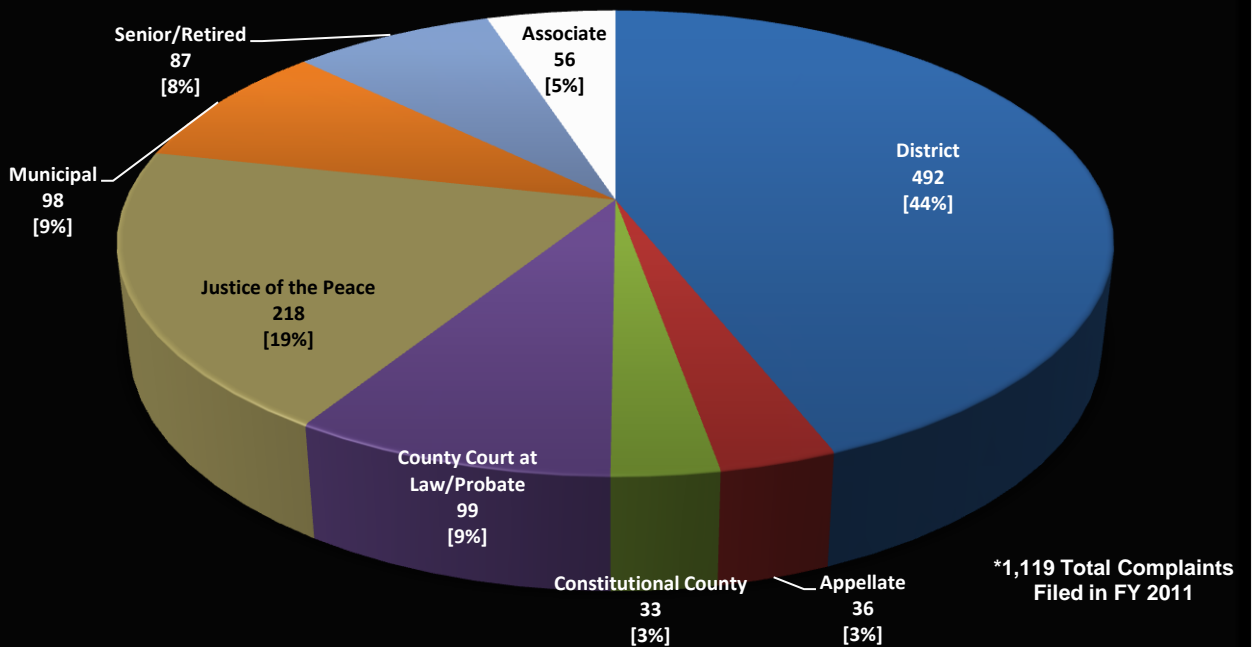


Fig. 3 Number and Percentage of Disciplinary Actions by Judge Type*

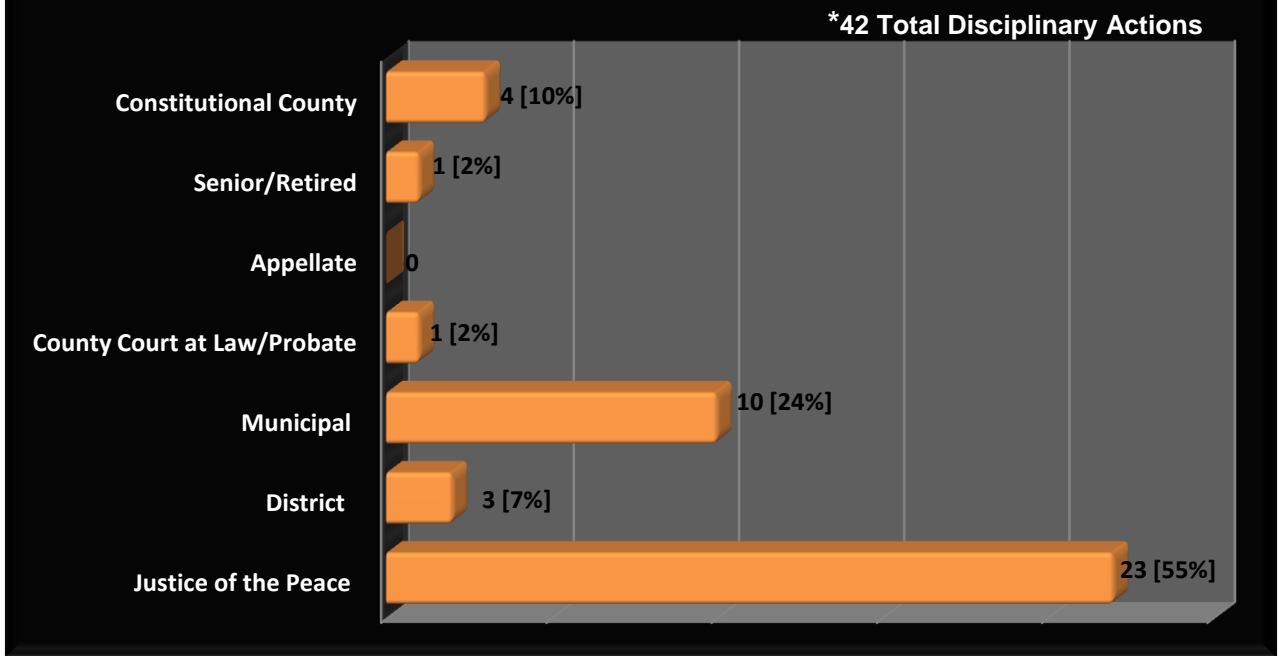
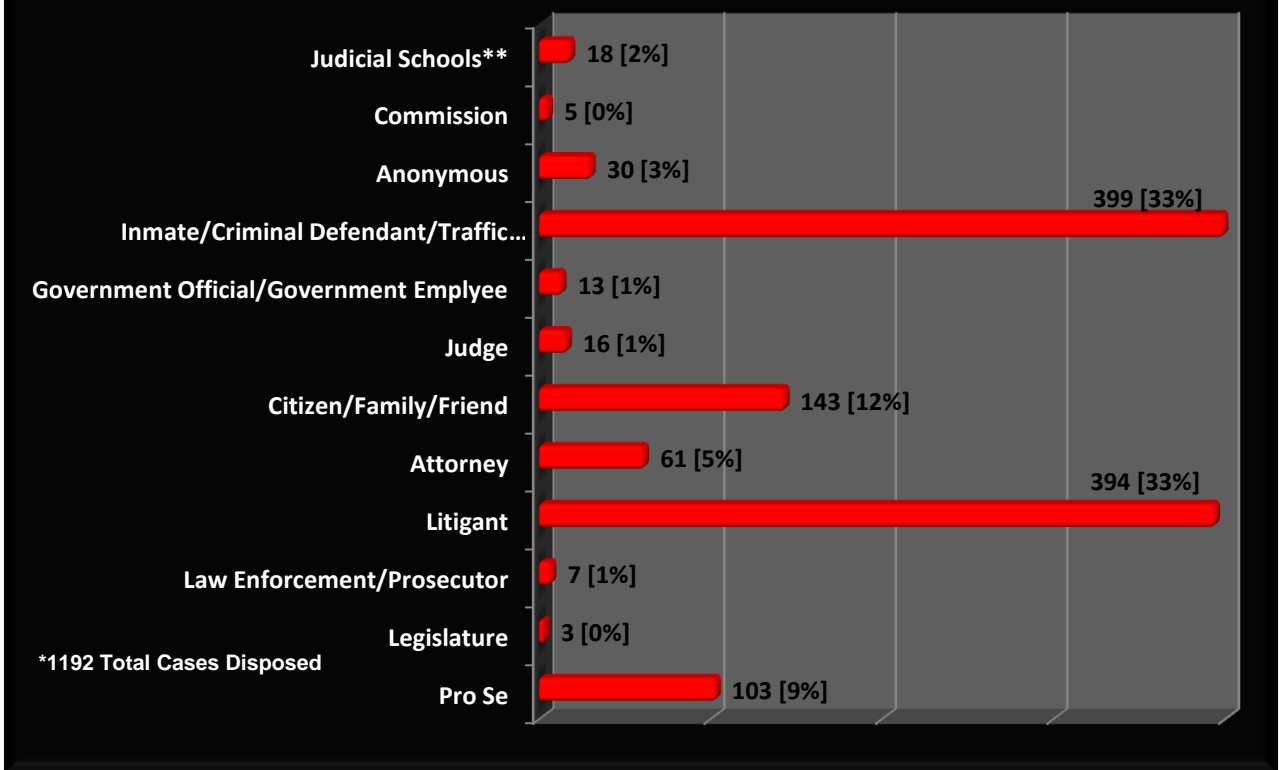


Fig. 4 Number of Cases Disposed By Complainant Type*



**Complaints submitted by judicial schools regard allegations that a judge failed to attain judicial education during a specific fiscal year.

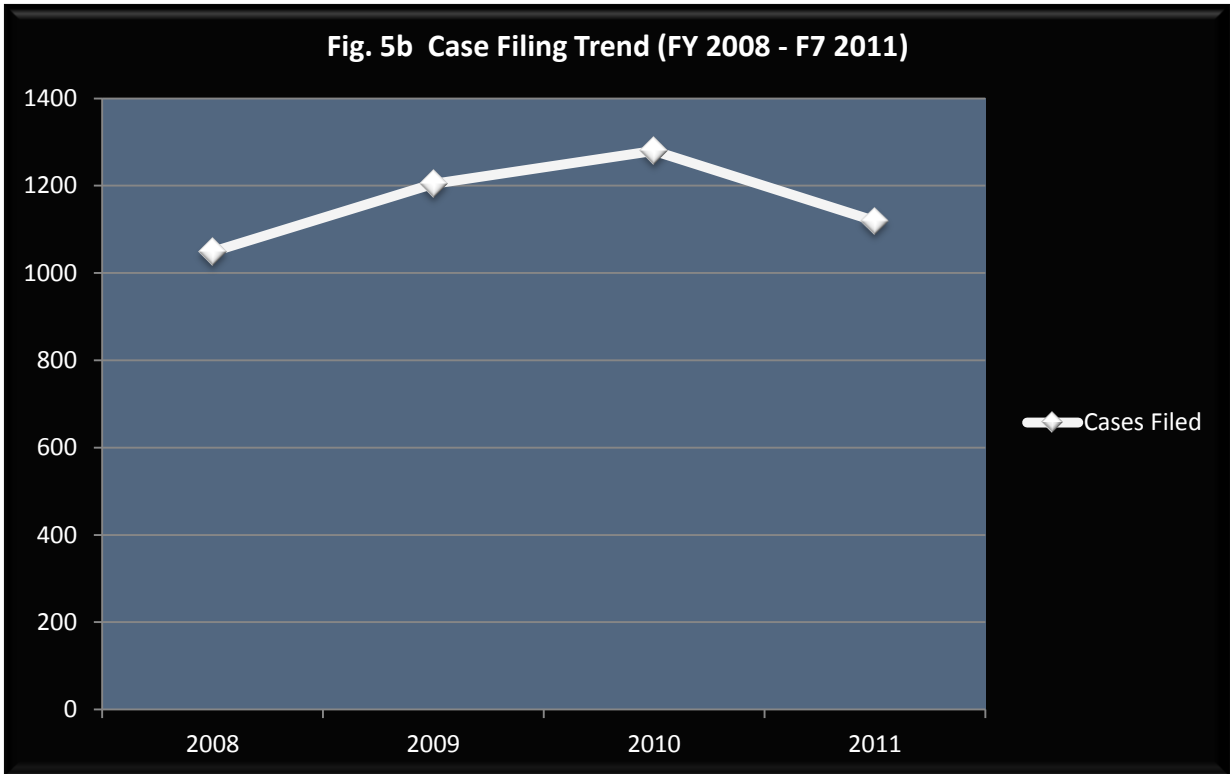
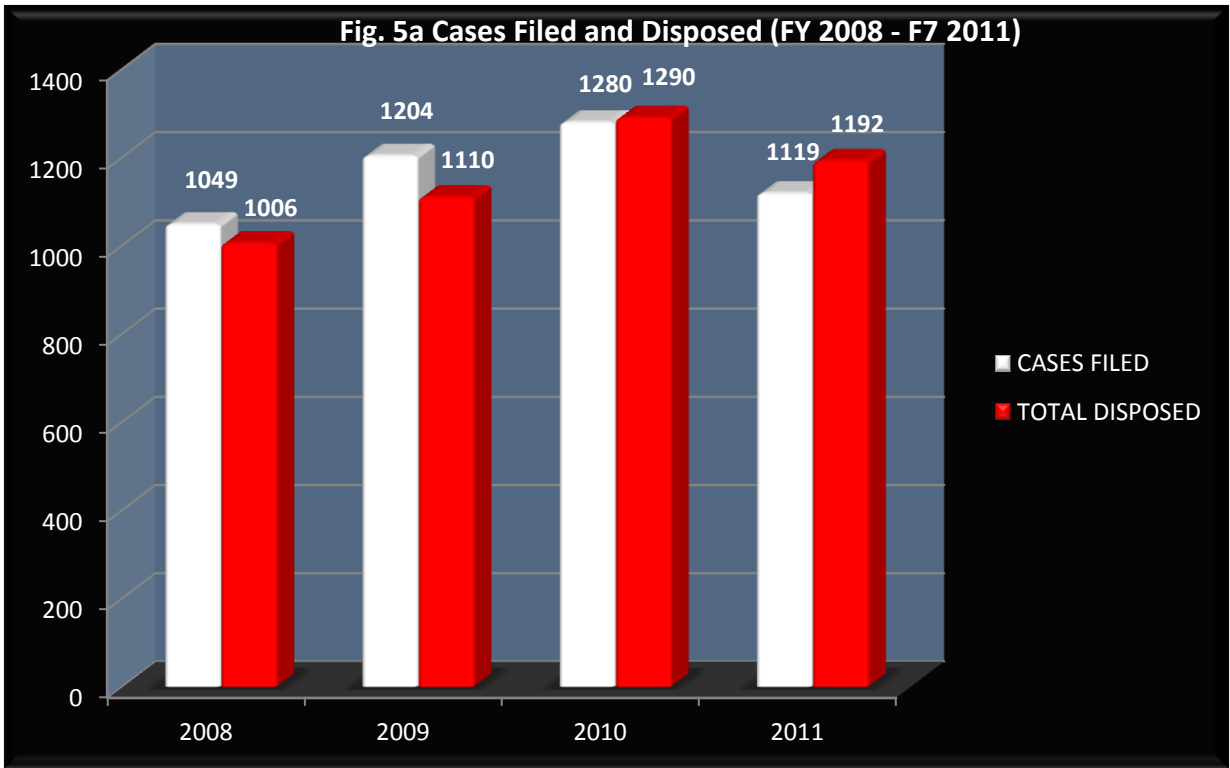


Fig. 6a Commission Activity (FY 2008-2011)

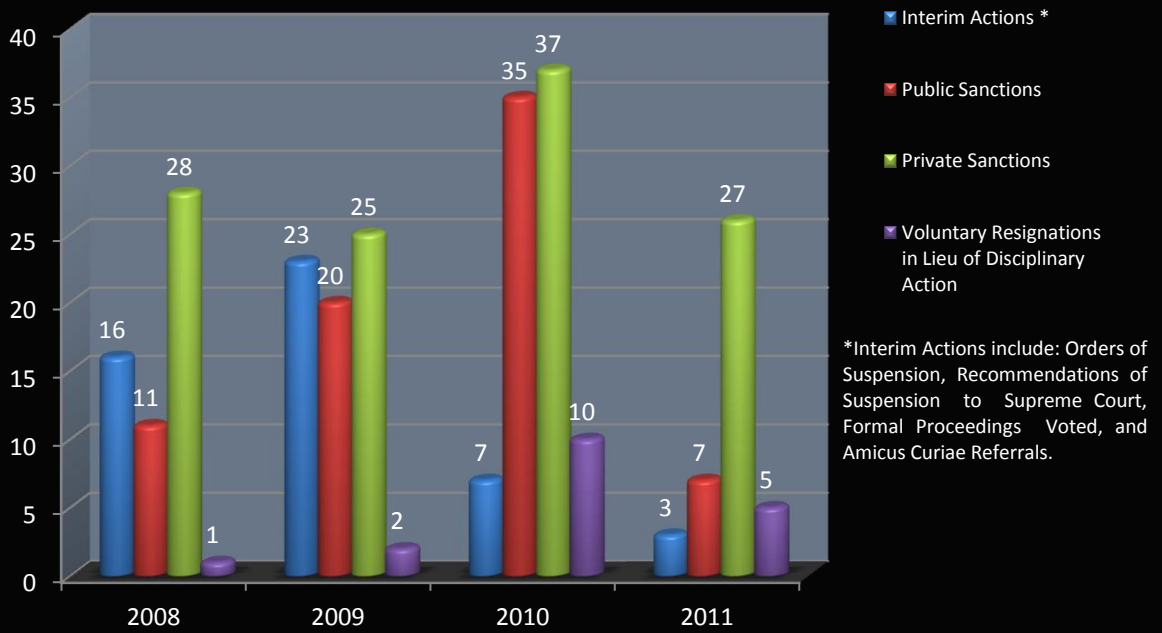


Fig. 6b. Commission Activity Trends (FY 2008-2011)

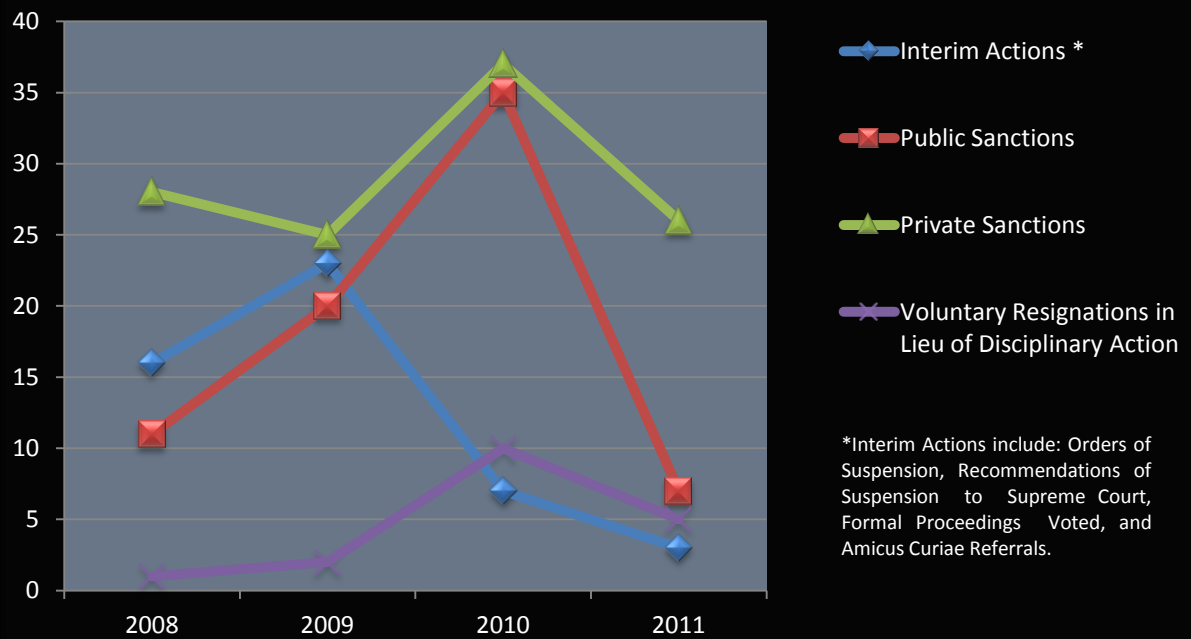


Fig. 7a Comparison of Investigations by Type (2008-2011)

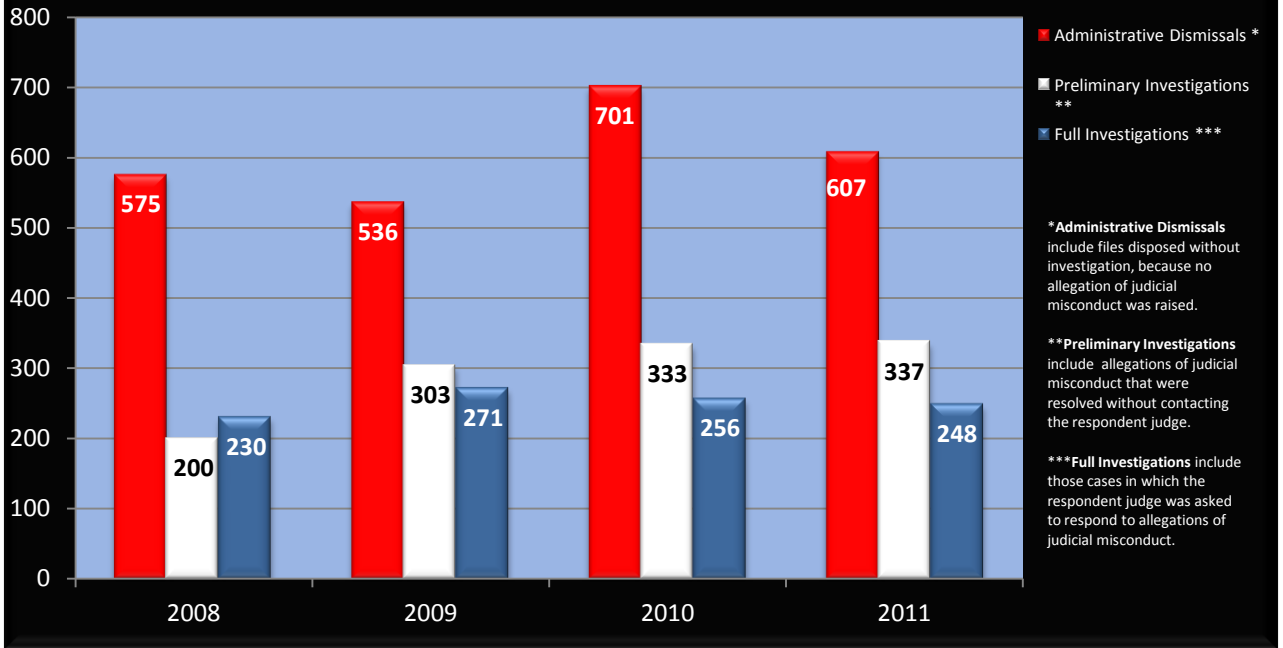
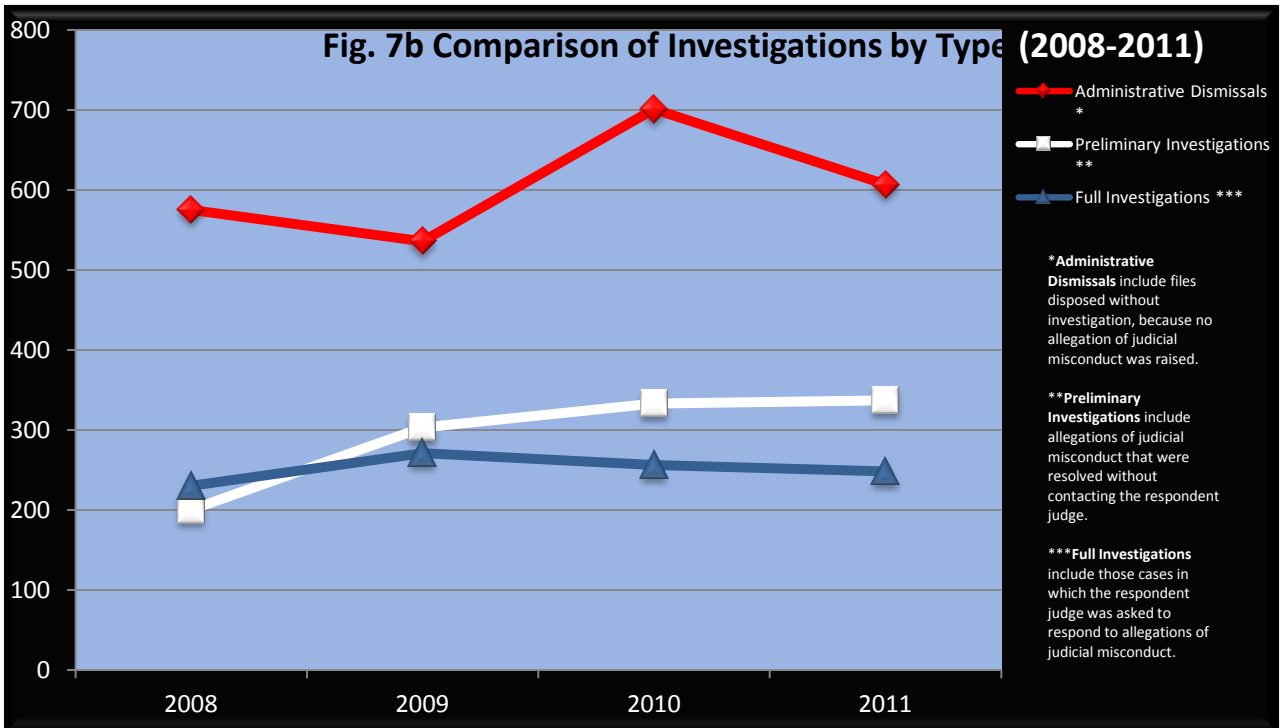


Fig. 7b Comparison of Investigations by Type (2008-2011)



EXAMPLES OF IMPROPER JUDICIAL CONDUCT

The following are examples of judicial misconduct that resulted in disciplinary action by the Commission in fiscal year 2011. These are illustrative examples of misconduct and do not represent every disciplinary action taken by the Commission in fiscal year 2011. The summaries below are listed in relation to specific violations of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, the Texas Constitution, and other statutes or rules. They are also listed in descending order of the severity of the disciplinary action imposed, and may involve more than one violation. The full text of any public sanction is published on the Commission website. A copy of any public disciplinary record may also be requested by contacting the Commission.

These sanction summaries are provided with the intent to educate and inform the judiciary and the public regarding misconduct that the Commission found to warrant disciplinary action in fiscal year 2011. The reader should note that the summaries provide only general information and may omit mitigating or aggravating facts that the Commission considered when determining the level of sanction to be imposed. Additionally, the reader should not make any inference from the fact situations provided in these summaries.

It is important to remember that the purpose of judicial discipline is not to punish the judge for engaging in misconduct but to protect the public by alerting them that conduct that violates the public trust will not be condoned. However, the reader should note that not every transgression reported to the Commission will, or should, result in disciplinary action. The Commission has broad discretion to determine whether disciplinary action is appropriate, and the degree of discipline to be imposed. Factors such as the seriousness of the transgression, whether there is a pattern of improper activity, and the effect of the improper activity on others or on the judicial system, will inform and impact the Commission's decision in each case. It is the Commission's sincere desire that providing this information will protect and preserve the public's confidence in the competence, integrity, impartiality and independence of the judiciary and further assist the judiciary in establishing, maintaining and enforcing the highest standards of conduct – both on the bench and in their personal lives.

CANON 2A: 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.

- The judge failed to comply with the law and failed to act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary by entering a “guilty” or “no contest” plea to an offense that constituted a violation of Section 12.44(b) of the Texas Penal Code. The incident that gave rise to the criminal case was captured on video and received widespread media attention, casting public discredit on the judiciary and the administration of justice. [Violation of Canon 2A of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct and Article V, §1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution.] *Public Warning of a Senior Judge.* (10/14/10).

- The judge failed to comply with the law and demonstrated a lack of professional competence in the law by: (1) denying Complainant his due process rights to a hearing regarding a permit violation charge when she failed and/or refused to provide Complainant with the opportunity to enter a “not guilty” plea to the charge and/or have a trial in the matter; (2) adjudicating Complainant’s guilt and assessing a fine in his absence without notice and without setting a court date; and (3) threatening Complainant with arrest if he did not pay the fine when he appeared in court. The judge also acted improperly when she shredded documents in violation of the minimum records retention schedule established by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. [Violation of Canons 2A, 3B(2) and 3B(8) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Reprimand and Order of Additional Education of a Justice of the Peace.* (12/10/10).
- The judge exceeded the scope of his authority and failed to comply with the law by jailing an individual, without notice and a hearing, for contempt following a confrontation between the judge and the individual after court proceedings had adjourned. [Violation of Canons 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Reprimand of a District Judge.* (01/26/11).
- The judge failed to comply with the law and failed to maintain professional competence in the law by permitting defendants to make charitable donations in lieu of performing community service when he knew, or should have known, the law does not permit such a substitution for class C misdemeanors. When asked by a defendant wishing to make a charitable donation in lieu of performing community service to which organization to give, the judge lent the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of those specific charitable entities he identified. The judge also failed to comply with the law and failed to maintain professional competence in the law when he followed a procedure that had the practical effect of placing a commercial driver’s license holder on deferred disposition, when he knew that the law prohibited him from doing so. Finally, the judge failed to treat a member of his court staff in a patient, dignified and courteous manner by making jokes in court that he knew, or should have known, would cause the staff member public embarrassment and humiliation. [Violation of Canons 2A, 2B, 3B(2), and 3B(4) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Reprimand of a Former Municipal Court Judge.* (08/31/11).
- The judge failed to comply with the law and demonstrated a lack of professional competence in the law when he signed an “Order of Reversal” reinstating a traffic case without input or participation from the State. [Violation of Canon 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Warning and Order of Additional Education of a Municipal Court Judge.* (11/23/10).
- The judge failed to follow the law and maintain professional competence in the law by (1) failing to provide a party with notice of a hearing, and (2) issuing orders in a case over which she had lost plenary power. [Violation of Canons 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition and Order of Additional Education of a Justice of the Peace.* (01/19/11).

- The judge failed to follow the proper procedures set forth in the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure prior to incarcerating an individual for his inability to pay his fines. The judge's conduct demonstrated a failure to comply with established law, and a lack of professional competence in the law. [Violation of Canons 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition of a Municipal Court Judge.* (09/24/10).
- The judge failed to comply with the law and failed to maintain professional competence in the law when she allowed her court staff and city prosecutors to "take" pleas from juvenile defendants in her absence. The judge failed to comply with the plain language of the statute, which requires that juvenile pleas be taken and accepted contemporaneously in a courtroom setting in the presence of both the judge and the juvenile's parent or guardian. [Violation of Canon 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition of a Former Municipal Court Judge.* (04/04/11).
- The judge failed to comply with the law and failed to maintain professional competence in the law when he: (1) ordered various individuals in his court into "timeout", and ordered his bailiff to handcuff two individuals when they tried to leave during the "timeout" period; (2) attempted to mediate a dispute between two roommates in a matter that was not pending in his court; (3) allowed tenants in eviction cases to "cure" defaults in their rental obligations, in contravention of the parties' rental agreements; and (4) held a show cause hearing in which he summoned a landlord's attorneys back to court after losing jurisdiction in an eviction case, threatened to sanction the attorneys for allegedly acting in bad faith, and thereafter issued a public memorandum chastising one of the attorneys for his conduct in the case. [Violation of Canons 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition of a former Justice of the Peace.* (05/09/11).
- The judge failed to follow the law and demonstrated a lack of professional competence in the law by: (a) failing to issue an adequate show cause order specifying the underlying contemptuous act of which Complainant was accused; (b) failing to ensure that Complainant was personally served with a copy of the order to show cause; (c) treating Complainant's contempt proceeding in a matter suggesting that Complainant had been accused of a criminal offense; (d) entering an order adjudging Complainant in contempt of court and setting a fine in his case prior to the hearing; (e) setting Complainant's fine in an amount in excess of the \$100.00 limit provided in section 21.002(c) of the Texas Government Code. The judge further engaged in an improper *ex parte* communication with the prosecutor; dismissed the Complainant's case without first receiving a written motion from prosecutor; and failed to enter a final written order or judgment in Complainant's case. [Violation of Canons 2A, 3B(2), and 6C(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Order of Additional Education of a Municipal Court Judge.* (02/15/11).

CANON 2B: A judge shall not allow any relationship to influence judicial conduct or judgment. A judge shall not lend the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others; nor shall a judge convey or permit others to convey the impression that they are in a special position to influence the judge.

- The judge wrote a letter of support on behalf of a criminal defendant, and thereby lent the prestige of his judicial office to advance the private interests of that defendant and his family. [Violation of Canon 2B of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Public Reprimand of a Justice of the Peace.* (03/31/11).

CANON 3B(1): A judge shall hear and decide matters assigned to the judge except those in which disqualification is required or recusal is appropriate.

- The judge presided over a criminal matter wherein he was the injured party. The judge was disqualified from presiding over the matter and should have arranged to have another judge handle the plea. [Violation of Canon 2A and 3B(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition of a Former County Judge.* (03/31/11).

CANON 3B(2): A judge should be faithful to the law and shall maintain professional competence in it. A judge shall not be swayed by partisan interests, public clamor, or fear of criticism.

- The judge issued a summons for a citizen to appear in his court when no case was pending against the citizen and no criminal charges had been filed against him. The citizen was threatened with arrest if he did not appear in court, and was forced to retain the services of an attorney in order to resolve the matter. [Violations of Canons 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Public Warning of a Justice of the Peace.* (04/06/11).
- The judge exceeded the scope of his judicial authority and misused his position as judge when he approached a driver who he believed had been speeding, identified himself as a judge, ordered her to produce her driver's license to him, and directed her to appear in his chambers in order to obtain the return of her license. With no case pending in his court, the judge forced the driver to appear before him in order to lecture her about his own personal feelings about her driving. The judge also exceeded the scope of his judicial authority when he (1) directed his court staff to accept payments from defendants on behalf of plaintiffs to discharge judgments and/or to comply with the terms of settlement agreements in cases that either were, or had been, pending in his court, and (2) directed his court staff to accept rental payments from tenants on behalf of landlords in eviction cases that either were, or had been, pending in his court. [Violations of Canons 2A, 2B, and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Public Admonition of a Former Justice of the Peace.* (05/09/11).
- Six (6) judges failed to obtain the mandatory judicial education hours during the 2010 academic year. [Violation of Canons 2A and 3B(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition and Order of Additional Education of Five Justices of the Peace and a Municipal Court Judge.* (03/29/11 – 04/07/11).

CANON 3B(4): A judge shall be patient, dignified and courteous to litigants, jurors, witnesses, lawyers and others with whom the judge deals in an official capacity, and should require similar conduct of lawyers, and of staff, court officials and others subject to the judge's direction and control.

- The judge willfully and/or persistently violated the law when he: (1) engaged in conduct that favored a relative of a member of the city council; (2) engaged in an undignified, impatient, and discourteous conversation with the mother of a juvenile defendant; and (3) engaged in undignified, impatient, and discourteous treatment of the juvenile including having the juvenile arrested and handcuffed. [Violation of Canons 2B and 3B(4) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Warning and Order of Additional Education of a Municipal Court Judge.* (07/11/11).

CANON 3B(5): A judge shall perform judicial duties without bias or prejudice.

- During the magistration of a defendant for the alleged theft of a student's Aggie ring, the judge (a) displayed his own Aggie ring, (b) advised the defendant that he should consider attending another school outside of College Station, and then (c) relied on information not contained or charged in the probable cause affidavit to enhance the standard bond for a state jail felony to \$50,000. [Violation of Canons 3B(4) and 3B(5) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, Article V, §1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution.] *Public Reprimand and Order of Additional Education of a Justice of the Peace.* (07/11/11).

CANON 3B(8): 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. A judge shall not initiate, permit, or consider *ex parte* communications or other communications made to the judge outside the presence of the parties between the judge and a party, an attorney, a guardian or attorney ad litem, an alternative dispute resolution neutral, or any other court appointee concerning the merits of a pending or impending judicial proceeding. A judge shall require compliance with this subsection by court personnel subject to the judge's direction and control.

- The judge went beyond the scope of his judicial role as a neutral arbiter and deprived the parties of an opportunity to respond to his findings when he undertook an independent investigation as to whether the witnesses had committed perjury. At the time of this investigation the judge had not issued a final judgment in the still-pending case. The judge knew or should have known his actions could have caused a reasonable person to question whether or not he would be impartial or could have resulted in his becoming a fact witness in post-trial proceedings. [Violation of Canon 3B(8) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Warning and Order of Additional Education of a County Court at Law Judge.* (12/08/10).

- The judge failed to comply with the law, engaged in an improper *ex parte* communication with a litigant, and denied a party the right to be heard according to law when he: (1) communicated and plea bargained with a defendant outside the presence of the State; (2) dismissed several of the defendant's cases without input or consent from the State; and (3) erroneously noted on the file jackets of the dismissed cases that the State and its witness were not ready for trial. [Violation of Canons 2A, 3B(8), and 6C(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition and Order of Additional Education of a Municipal Court Judge.* (07/12/11).

CANON 4C(2): A judge shall not solicit funds for any educational, religious, charitable, fraternal or civic organization, but may be listed as an officer, director, delegate, or trustee of such an organization, and may be a speaker or a guest of honor at an organization's fund raising events.

- The judge willfully and/or persistently violated the law when he allowed defendants to make donations to private non-profit organizations in exchange for a credit on their assessed fines. The judge's practice of maintaining and providing a list of approved organizations to which the defendants were allowed to make donations, which list included a scholarship program started by the judge, combined with the "Thank You" letters sent to the judge by the organizations who received the donations, created the impression that (1) he was personally soliciting donations on behalf of those organizations, (2) he was lending the prestige of his judicial office to advance the organizations' private interests, and (3) the organizations were in a special position to influence him. [Violation of Canons 2B and 4C(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Reprimand of a Justice of the Peace.* (07/11/11).

CANON 4E(1): A judge shall not serve as executor, administrator, or other personal representative, trustee guardian, attorney in fact or other fiduciary, expect for the estate, trust or person of a member of the judge's family, and then only if such service will not interfere with the proper performance of judicial duties.

- The judge continued to serve as trustee of a trust for a long time friend, and as a fiduciary or personal representative of that friend, after becoming County Judge and refused to voluntarily remove himself as trustee even after legal action was taken against him. [Violation of Canon 4E(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Public Admonition of a County Judge.* (12/16/10).

CANON 4(G): A judge shall not practice law except as permitted by statute or this Code. Notwithstanding this prohibition, a judge may act pro se and may, without compensation, give legal advice to and draft or review documents for a member of the judge's family.

- The judge improperly acted as an advocate and legal counsel for a family member in a small claims action by (a) initiating contact with opposing counsel in an effort to negotiate a settlement on behalf of the family member; and (b) appearing at trial, passing notes to the family member that included legal advice and trial strategy, and requesting that he be permitted to sit at counsel table with the family

member. [Violation of Canon 4G of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.] *Private Admonition of a District Judge.* (10/14/10).

Texas Constitution, Article V, Section 1-a(6)A. Any Justice or Judge of the courts established by this Constitution or created by the Legislature as provided in Section 1, Article V, of this Constitution, may, subject to the other provisions hereof, be removed from office for willful or persistent violation of rules promulgated by the Supreme Court of Texas, incompetence in performing the duties of the office, willful violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct, or 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. Any person holding such office may be disciplined or censured, in lieu of removal from office, as provided by this section.

- The judge forwarded letters of introduction to specific members of the community, which cast doubt on the judge's ability to act impartially in certain types of cases those members filed in his court and conveyed the impression that they would be in a special position to influence the judge when deciding cases. The judge further delayed providing pertinent information in response to the Commission's inquiries, which hindered the Commission's ability to make a timely and informed decision about the matter. [Violation of Canons 2B, 4A(1) and Article V, Section 1-a(6) of the Texas Constitution.] *Private Warning of a Justice of the Peace.* (01/31/11).