

**COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
JUDICIAL CONDUCT COMMISSION**

IN RE THE MATTER OF:

**ROBERT F. WRIGHT, DISTRICT COURT JUDGE
35TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

PUBLIC REPRIMAND

Robert F. Wright is a District Court Judge for Kentucky's 35th Judicial Circuit consisting of Pike County. Judge Wright has waived formal proceedings and has agreed to this disposition.

The Commission conducted a preliminary investigation resulting from two (2) separate complaints. In the first complaint, the Commission received information that on February 11, 2019, Judge Wright held a hearing in Pike County Case No. 19-S-00011, styled *Cantrell-Ratliff v. Gillespie*, a small claims case in which the plaintiff sought the return of her boat. The hearing was held the same morning the complaint was filed. The defendant was never served and therefore not present at the hearing. At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge Wright issued a docket order in favor of the plaintiff directing the boat to be returned to the plaintiff. Judge Wright acknowledges that he knew the plaintiff, and she had previously worked on his judicial campaign. After the defendant filed a *pro se* answer and counterclaim, Judge Wright rescinded his order.

In the second complaint, the Commission received information that Judge Wright presided over Pike County Case Nos. 18-T-2705 and 18-T-4432, both styled *Commonwealth v. Angel Watson*. In those matters, the defendant requested that Judge Wright recuse and filed a petition for the Chief Justice to assign a special judge. The defendant was a previous client of Judge Wright, and Judge Wright had posted a video to his Facebook page during his campaign calling the defendant a "liar and a thief." Judge Wright held a hearing in the

matter on March 12, 2019, even though the petition for the Chief Justice was still pending. The Chief Justice subsequently disqualified Judge Wright from the matters and assigned a special judge.

The Commission concludes that Judge Wright's conduct violated SCR 4.020(1)(b)(i) by engaging in misconduct in office. The Commission further concludes that Judge Wright violated SCR 4.300 and the relevant portions of the following Rules of the Code of Judicial Conduct:

Rule 1.1 which requires judges to comply with the law.

Rule 1.2 which requires judges to act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary.

Rule 2.2 which requires a judge to perform all duties of judicial office fairly and impartially.

Rule 2.3 which requires a judge to perform the duties of judicial office without bias or prejudice.

Rule 2.6 which requires a judge to 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.

Rule 2.9 which requires a judge to disqualify himself or herself in any proceeding in which the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned.

Based on the foregoing conduct, Judge Wright is hereby publicly reprimanded. In making the disposition in this Order, the Commission duly considered that Judge Wright fully cooperated in the matter.

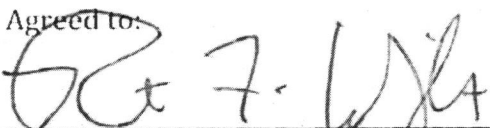
Date:

12/23/19


STEPHEN D. WOLNITZEK, CHAIR

Judge Coleman recused from any consideration of this matter.

Agreed to:


Hon. Robert F. Wright, District Court Judge