

**COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
JUDICIAL CONDUCT COMMISSION**

IN RE THE MATTER OF:

**HOWARD KEITH HALL, CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE
DIVISION II, 35TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

PUBLIC REPRIMAND

Howard Keith Hall is a Circuit Court Judge for Kentucky's 35th Judicial Circuit consisting of Pike County. Judge Hall has waived formal proceedings and has agreed to this disposition.

Judge Howard Keith Hall has engaged in repeated violations of the Code of Judicial Conduct, including *ex parte* communications, inappropriate discussions of confidential matters, rendering grievances from the bench, threatening a prosecutor, and conducting independent investigations outside his judicial role.

On January 31, 2024, Judge Hall met with a criminal defendant, outside the presence of the Commonwealth, completed and signed an Affidavit of Indigency, and appointed counsel for the Defendant.

On February 7, 2024, Judge Hall made a phone call to a prosecutor following the filing of a motion for recusal in the same matter. During the call, he accused the Commonwealth of attempting to destroy him, invited them to meet privately to resolve the issue, and threatened to "make life difficult for them." When the prosecutor referenced prior allegations of *ex parte* communications, Judge Hall escalated his hostility.

On February 8, 2024, during a defendant's scheduled arraignment, Judge Hall responded to the Commonwealth's clarification regarding questioning defendants about indigency, saying, "Wow... Merry Christmas," and made similar inappropriate comments about a recusal motion, accusing others of being "out to get him." He also asked the

Commonwealth Attorney whether they intended to withdraw the motion to recuse, and upon their denial, overruled the motion but transferred the case to another judge. During this proceeding, he commented that “Judge Ed Coleman needs more cases.” He also remarked about having to refer the matter to the “ethics board” and people “inking up motions before they think.”

On February 12, 2024, Judge Hall stated from the bench that the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office had filed several ethics complaints about his Court and stated that he was working on a protocol for the next six years “if the ethics board doesn’t remove me.”

On February 29, 2024, Judge Hall again mentioned ethics charges filed against him and said that he had “cuffs thrown on” him due to ethics rules.

And, on April 4, 2024, he again made statements, while on the bench, that the Drug Court could do things he was unable to do and, if he did those things, some “nutjob” would file an ethics complaint against him.

All of these actions demonstrate bias, a lack of judicial decorum, and an abuse of judicial authority, undermining public confidence in the integrity, impartiality and independence of the judiciary.

During proceedings on May 11, 2023, Judge Hall admitted in open court that he had received calls from the defendant’s family members, including the defendant’s daughter, regarding the bond. The Commonwealth was unaware of these communications until Judge Hall disclosed them during the hearing.

On August 11, 2022, a defendant appeared before the court and Judge Hall admitted to calling him the day before to instruct him to come in, without informing the Commonwealth. Additionally, Judge Hall performed a wedding for a defendant while a motion to amend judgment was still pending in that defendant’s criminal case and without

disclosing his actions on the record. Finally, Judge Hall entered an order of expungement ex parte on August 6, 2024, without notice to the Commonwealth's Attorney and without a hearing. Judge Hall's conduct reflected a lack of fairness and transparency, eroding trust in the adversarial process.

During proceedings on February 28, 2024, Judge Hall referred to Drug Court as operating like a "cartel" and a "Star Chamber," and lamented that he could not praise defendants in his court as Drug Court could. He then went off the record to continue discussing Drug Court practices and later returned to the record to read aloud its policies, making additional statements about issues with Drug Court. On August 3, 2023, Judge Hall made inappropriate remarks about Judge Eddy Coleman, stating that Judge Coleman's courtroom was "worse than jail." Finally, on May 2, 2024, Judge Hall made inappropriate remarks from the bench about a defendant after his sentencing, remarking that the defendant just "wants to dope 'til he dies" and discussed the case with the next defendant. These comments revealed unprofessional and personal bias, undermining the dignity of the judiciary and public confidence in his impartiality.

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

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 and to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.

Rule 2.3(A) which prohibits judges from performing their judicial duties with bias or prejudice.

Rule 2.4(C) which prohibits judges from conveying or permitting others to convey the impression that any person or organization is in a position to influence the judge.

Rule 2.8(B) which requires judges to be patient, dignified, and courteous to litigants, jurors, witnesses, lawyers, court staff, court officials, and others with whom the judge deals in an official capacity.

Rule 2.9(A) which prohibits judges from initiating, permitting, or considering *ex parte* communications or consider other communications made to the judge outside the presence of the parties or their lawyers, concerning a pending or impending matter.

Rule 2.9(C) which prohibits judges from investigating facts in a matter independently and requires judges to only consider evidence presented and any facts that may be properly judicially noticed.

Based on the foregoing conduct, Judge Hall is hereby publicly reprimanded. In rendering its disposition, the Commission duly considered that Judge Hall fully cooperated in the matter.

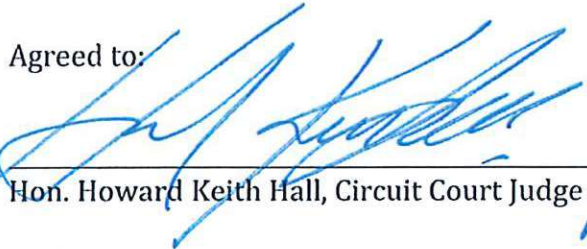
Date:

April 2, 2025



R. MICHAEL SULLIVAN, CHAIR

Agreed to:

 4/2/25

Hon. Howard Keith Hall, Circuit Court Judge

Judge Coleman recused in this matter.