



STATE OF TENNESSEE BOARD OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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January 4, 2023

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MEMBERS OF THE TENNESSEE
BOARD OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

Dee David Gay
Board Chair

Judge Casey Stokes
P.O. Box 206
Georgetown, TN 37336

G. Andrew Brigham
Vice Chair

RE: Public Reprimand
File No. B22-9094

Marshall L. Davidson, III
Disciplinary Counsel

Shane Hutton
Assistant Disciplinary Counsel

Dear Judge Stokes:

This letter shall serve as a public reprimand pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated section 17-5-303(e)(2)(B)(i)(c).

Ronald Satterfield, a litigant in your court, filed a complaint alleging that during a hearing on October 11, 2022, you called him a “tough guy” and stated that you hoped he would run into someone like you one day. You also told Mr. Satterfield that “if somebody called [your] grandfather a SOB we would be in more than a cuss fight, we would be in a fist fight, and probably to the death.” Mr. Satterfield further claims that you mocked his wife’s physical disability by impersonating her movements and that you told his daughter to “shut up” as the daughter was trying to explain her mother’s neurological disability and thus the reason for her uncontrolled hand and arm movements in court.

In a response dated November 11, 2022, you admitted calling Mr. Satterfield a “tough guy” during the hearing. You also admitted telling him, “I hope you meet someone just like yourself one day” as he was leaving the courtroom following the hearing. In addition, you have acknowledged telling the daughter to “shut up” in court. You noted in your response that the Satterfields had interrupted you and that they were being rude toward the opposing party.

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Judges are expected to maintain the highest standards of conduct and dignity of judicial office at all times. Preamble, Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 10(2). This obligation includes the specific responsibility of being dignified and courteous to those with whom the judge deals in an official capacity. Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 10, RJC 2.8(B). Name-calling in court, such as referring to a party as “tough guy,” telling a witness to “shut up,” or making injudicious comments to a litigant leaving the courtroom such as “I hope you meet someone just like yourself one day,” are neither dignified nor courteous and set a poor example for everyone present.

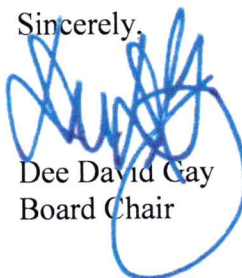
In addition, a party who is the subject of overly harsh or intemperate words, such as those involved here, may reasonably perceive that the judge is biased. Nor do such comments inspire confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. *See* Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 10, RJC 1.2.

In your response to the complaint, you note that the Satterfields were rude during the hearing. However, regardless of how rude or disrespectful a participant in a legal proceeding may be, the judge cannot reciprocate. To the contrary, the more tense or difficult the situation, the more important it is for the judge to remain dignified and composed and not be drawn into an escalating situation.

The investigative panel decided to impose a public reprimand for the conduct described above, which you have accepted. In imposing this sanction, the panel considered that you previously received a warning concerning a lack of self-control in raising your voice and using intemperate words in court. The panel further noted that you have taken full responsibility for your conduct and that you have fully cooperated with disciplinary counsel throughout this matter.

In short, the conduct described above fails to meet the standards of conduct expected of those privileged to hold judicial office. The Board trusts that the reprimand imposed today will cause you to avoid any future conduct that gives even the appearance of any impropriety or the display of any undignified behavior.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dee David Gay", is written over the typed name. The signature is stylized and somewhat illegible due to the cursive nature of the handwriting.

Dee David Gay
Board Chair