

**STATE OF MARYLAND**  
**COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL DISABILITIES**



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**FOR**  
**FISCAL YEAR 2015**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION.**

This Annual Report is prepared by the Maryland Commission on Judicial Disabilities (“Commission”) for submission to the Maryland Court of Appeals, pursuant to Maryland Rule 16-804(g).

The Commission is the primary disciplinary body to investigate complaints that allege judicial misconduct or mental or physical disability of Maryland judicial officers, as empowered by the Maryland Constitution.

The work of the Commission plays a vital role in maintaining public confidence in, and preserving the integrity and impartiality of, the judiciary. The Commission, by providing a forum for citizens with complaints against judges, helps maintain the balance between judicial independence and public accountability. The Commission also helps to improve and strengthen the judiciary by creating a greater awareness among judges of proper judicial conduct.

The laws creating and governing the Commission's work are as follows:

- Maryland Constitution, Art. IV, Sections 4A and 4B
- Annotated Code of Maryland, Courts and Judicial Proceedings, Sections 13-401 through 13-403
- Maryland Rules 16-803 through 16-810
- Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct, Maryland Rule 16-813

Copies of the above Maryland Constitution and Rules provisions are available on the Commission's website at [www.mdcourts.gov/cjd/index.html](http://www.mdcourts.gov/cjd/index.html).

## **II. HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION.**

The Commission was established by constitutional amendment in 1966 in response to a growing need for an independent body to assist in monitoring the conduct of Maryland judges. Subsequent constitutional amendments strengthened the Commission, clarified its powers, and added four additional members of the public to the Commission. The Constitution requires the Court of Appeals to adopt rules for the implementation and enforcement of the Commission's powers and the practice and procedures before the Commission.

The Maryland Constitution, Art. IV, Section 4B(a)(1)(i) & (ii) & 2, gives the Commission the following specific powers to:

- “Investigate complaints against any judge of the Court of Appeals, any intermediate courts of appeal, the circuit courts, the District Court of Maryland, or the orphans' court.”

- “Conduct hearings concerning such complaints, administer oaths and affirmations, issue process to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of evidence, and require persons to testify and produce evidence by granting them immunity from prosecution or from penalty or forfeiture.”
- “issue a reprimand.”
- “recommend to the Court of Appeals the removal, censure, or other appropriate disciplining of a judge or, in an appropriate case, retirement.”

Further, the Maryland Rules give the Commission the authority to dismiss complaints (with or without a warning), issue private reprimands, enter into deferred discipline agreements with judges, and if the Commission “finds by clear and convincing evidence that the judge has a disability or has committed sanctionable conduct, it shall either issue a public reprimand for the sanctionable conduct or refer the matter to the Court of Appeals. . . .” with the recommendation of the Commission as to the sanction to be imposed against the judge. All dismissals with a warning, private reprimands and deferred discipline agreements require the consent of the respondent judge.

The Commission Members consist of eleven persons: three representing judges, one representing the appellate courts, one representing the Circuit Courts, and one representing the District Court; three lawyers, with each admitted to practice law in Maryland and having at least seven years of experience; and five members of the public, none of whom are active or retired judges, admitted to practice law in Maryland, or persons having a financial relationship with, or receive compensation from, a judge or lawyer licensed in Maryland. All Commission Members are appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the State Senate, and are citizens and residents of Maryland. Membership is limited to two, four-year terms, or, if initially appointed to fill a vacancy, for no more than a total of ten years.

Effective July 1, 2007, the Court of Appeals established by Rule the Judicial Inquiry Board (“Board”), thereby creating a “two-tier” structure within the Commission. The Board consists of seven persons: two judges, two lawyers, and three public Members who are not lawyers or judges. Board Members are appointed by the Commission Members for a term of four years.

Complaints against Maryland judges are investigated by the Commission's Investigative Counsel (“Investigative Counsel”). The Commission's Judicial Inquiry Board (“Board”) monitors and reviews the Investigative Counsel's investigations, reports and recommendations and submits its own reports and recommendations to the Commission Members. The Commission Members accept or reject the Board's recommendations and take action consistent with the powers and authority granted to the Commission.

### III. THE COMMISSION'S JURISDICTION - WHAT THE COMMISSION CAN AND CANNOT DO.

The Commission is authorized to investigate complaints only against judges of the Maryland Court of Appeals, Court of Special Appeals, Circuit Courts, District Courts, and Orphans' Courts, and any retired Maryland judge during the period that the retired judge has been approved to sit. The Commission:

1. Has no authority to investigate complaints against masters, examiners, administrative law judges, Federal Judges, lawyers, police, court personnel, State's Attorneys, or public defenders.
2. Does not have appellate authority and therefore cannot review, reverse, change, or modify a legal decision or other court action taken by a judge;
3. Cannot affect the progress or outcome of a case; and
4. Cannot require a judge's recusal or disqualify a judge from presiding over a particular case.

The only types of complaints that can be investigated by the Commission are those involving a Maryland Judge's alleged "sanctionable conduct" or "disability":

1. "Sanctionable conduct" means:
  - "misconduct while in office";
  - "persistent failure by a judge to perform the duties of the judge's office";
  - "conduct prejudicial to the proper administration of justice"; or
  - violation of the binding obligations of the Maryland Code of Judicial Conduct.

"Sanctionable conduct" does not include the following by a judge, unless the judge's conduct also involves "fraud or corrupt motive or raises a substantial question as to the judge's fitness for office":

- "making an erroneous finding of fact";
- "reaching an incorrect legal conclusion";
- "misapplying the law"; or

- “failure to decide matters in a timely fashion, unless such failure is habitual.”
2. “Disability” means a judge’s “mental or physical disability that:
- seriously interferes with the performance of a judge’s duties and
  - is, or is likely to become, permanent.”

#### **IV. THE COMPLAINT PROCESS.**

Any individual, including a party or witness in a court case, lawyer, member of the public, judge, person who works for or assists the court, or other person, who has information that a Maryland judge may have committed “sanctionable conduct” or has a “disability”, can file a complaint with the Commission by completing a complaint form that can be downloaded from the Commission’s website or received from the Commission’s office, or by preparing a letter with required information. (See the Commission’s website at [www.mdcourts.gov/cjd/complaint.html](http://www.mdcourts.gov/cjd/complaint.html) for details.)

If the complaint meets the Commission’s requirements, Investigative Counsel will open a file and send a letter to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and the procedure for investigating and processing the complaint. In addition, the Investigative Counsel may make an inquiry and open a file after receiving information from any source that indicates a judge may have committed sanctionable conduct or may have a disability.

Complaints and inquiries may be dismissed, prior to a preliminary investigation, if the “complaint [or inquiry] does not allege facts that, if true, would constitute a disability or sanctionable conduct and there are no reasonable grounds for a preliminary investigation.” If the complaint is not dismissed, or an inquiry is completed without a dismissal, the Investigative Counsel conducts an investigation and thereafter reports to the Board the results of the investigation, including one of the following recommendations:

- dismiss the complaint and terminate the investigation, with or without a warning to the judge against future sanctionable conduct;
- enter into a private reprimand or a deferred discipline agreement with the judge;
- authorize a further investigation; or
- file charges against the judge.

Upon receiving the Investigative Counsel's report, including recommendation, the Board reviews the report and recommendation and may authorize a further investigation, or meet informally with the judge for the purpose of discussing an appropriate disposition. Upon completion of the foregoing, the Board prepares a report, including recommendation, to the Commission Members that includes one of the following recommendations:

- dismiss the complaint and terminate the investigation, with or without a warning to the judge against future sanctionable conduct;
- enter a private reprimand or a deferred discipline agreement with the judge; or
- “upon a determination of probable cause, the filing of charges.”

The Commission Members can take action, with or without proceeding on charges, after reviewing the Board's report, including recommendation, and any objections filed by the judge. If the Commission Members direct their Investigative Counsel to file charges against the judge alleging that the judge committed sanctionable conduct or has a disability, the charges are served upon the judge and a hearing is scheduled as to the charges. This is a formal hearing conducted in accordance with the rules of evidence.

If after the hearing the Commission Members find by clear and convincing evidence that the judge has committed sanctionable conduct or has a disability, they can either issue a public reprimand for such sanctionable conduct or refer the case to the Court of Appeals with the Commission's recommendations as to disposition. The Court of Appeals can take any one of the following actions: “(1) impose the sanction recommended by the Commission or any other sanction permitted by law; (2) dismiss the proceeding; or (3) remand for further proceedings as specified in the order of remand.”

## **V. CONFIDENTIALITY.**

The complaint and all information and proceedings relating to the complaint, are confidential. The Investigative Counsel's work product and records not admitted into evidence before the Commission, the Commission's deliberations, and records of the Commission's deliberations are confidential.

After the respondent judge's filing of a response to charges alleging sanctionable conduct, or expiration of the response filing date, such charges and all subsequent proceedings before the Commission on such charges are not confidential and therefore open to the public. In addition, a respondent judge, by written waiver, may release confidential information.

Charges alleging only that a judge has a disability, and all proceedings before the Commission on such charges, are confidential.

## **VI. MEMBERS AND STAFF.**

### **COMMISSION MEMBERS**

#### **Judge Members:**

Honorable Alexander Wright, Jr., (Chair)  
Honorable Robert A. Greenberg (Vice-Chair)  
Honorable Susan H. Hazlett

#### **Attorney Members:**

Arielle F. Hinton, Esquire (See Footnote 1)  
Marisa A. Trasatti, Esquire (See Footnote 2)  
Richard M. Karceski, Esquire

#### **Public Members:**

Vacant (See Footnote 3)  
Marcy Canavan  
Susan J. Matlick  
Susan R. Hoffmann  
Vernon Hawkins, Jr.

### **JUDICIAL INQUIRY BOARD MEMBERS:**

#### **Judge Members:**

Honorable Marjorie L. Clagett, Chair  
Honorable Neil E. Axel

#### **Attorney Members:**

Aileen E. Oliver, Esquire  
Joseph A. Stevens, Esquire

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1 Arielle F. Hinton was appointed to succeed Mayda Tsaknis as an attorney Member by the Governor on April 8, 2015.

2 Marisa A. Trasatti was appointed to succeed Howard A. Miliman as an attorney Member by the Governor on June 19, 2015.

3 William D. Berkshire completed his maximum ten years of service and he was replaced by Governor O'Malley's appointment of Venkat Subramanian. Mr. Subramanian's name was not submitted to the State Senate for confirmation by Governor Hogan and the position became vacant.



**Public Members:**

Dr. Kenneth W. Eckmann  
Dr. Kevin Daniels  
The Honorable William J. Boarman

**STAFF:**

Executive Director/Investigative Counsel: Carol A. Crawford, Esquire  
Assistant Investigative Counsel: Tanya C. Bernstein, Esquire  
Executive Secretary: Gary J. Kolb, Esquire  
Administrative Assistant: Lisa R. Zinkand

**VII. MEETINGS.**

The Commission Members held nine regularly scheduled Meetings in FY 2015.

The Board Members held ten regularly scheduled Meetings in FY 2015.

**VIII. SUMMARY OF COMMISSION ACTIVITY IN FY 2015.**

During Fiscal Year 2015 (July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015), the Commission opened files for 158 verified complaints.

Eight complaints were filed by attorneys, 38 by inmates, 9 by Investigative Counsel, and 103 were filed by members of the general public.

Complaints against Circuit Court Judges totaled 107; 46 complaints were filed against District Court Judges; 2 complaints were filed against Court of Special Appeals Judges; and 3 complaints were filed against Orphans' Court Judges.

The types of cases involved include: family law matters (divorce, alimony custody, visitation, etc.) that prompted 22 complaints; criminal cases that prompted 49 complaints; and 84 complaints arose from other civil cases. Three complaints failed to fit in any of those categories.

The Commission authorized the filing of charges by the Investigative Counsel against a Circuit Court Judge regarding the Judge's alleged conduct involving the Judge's intimate relationship with a convicted felon and the Judge's actions, inactions, and other conduct related to that relationship. The public hearing was scheduled for August 24, 2015.

In addition, the Commission issued six (6) Private Reprimands involving the following:

- 1) Retired District Court Judge's inappropriate comments and not allowing the

respondent in a final protective order hearing to finish presenting his case [Private Reprimand issued in conjunction with a Deferred Discipline Agreement];

- 2) Circuit Court Judge's inappropriate comments made in open court regarding very personal information about the history of a defense witness during a hearing in a criminal case;
- 3) Circuit Court Judge habitually failed to decide matters in a timely fashion [Private Reprimand made public with consent of the Judge];
- 4) Retired Circuit Court Judge presided over a post-conviction hearing in which ineffective assistance of counsel was asserted and the Judge should not have presided over the hearing because such counsel, who testified for the State, had been engaged in the practice of law with the Judge prior to his appointment as a Judge;
- 5) Circuit Court Judge should have recused herself because she knew one of the victims, but the Judge continued to ask questions and ruled on one of the matters; and
- 6) Circuit Court Judge failed to issue a written order or other decision after a three-day bench trial, recusing herself one year later that resulted in the case having to be retried almost two years after the trial.

Further, the Commission issued three (3) dismissals with a warning involving the following:

- 1) Circuit Court Judge's failure to disclose a relationship with one of the attorneys for the defendant in a civil case and his failure to recuse himself because of that relationship;
- 2) Circuit Court Judge made disrespectful and condescending statements to the defendant in a civil case that were inappropriate and unnecessary and gave the appearance that the Judge was biased or prejudiced against the defendant; and
- 3) Circuit Court Judge's failed to issue a final decision on the merits in a civil case for over two years.

Ninety-one cases remained open at the end of Fiscal Year 2015.

The vast majority of complaints in Fiscal Year 2015, as in prior years, were dismissed because the allegations set forth in the complaints were either found to be unsubstantiated, or the conduct complained about did not constitute sanctionable conduct.

## IX. COMPARISON CHARTS OF COMMISSION ACTIVITY.

The data included in the following comparison charts is based on data from the Commission case files.

### TYPES OF CASES INVOLVED

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Family Law</b>	<b>Criminal Cases</b>	<b>Civil Cases</b>	<b>Other</b>
2000-2001	18	55	37	10
2001-2002	31	47	54	10
2002-2003	28	54	41	15
2003-2004	26	24	37	7
2004-2005	33	22	52	5
2005-2006	20	39	30	19
2006-2007	25	43	45	4
2007-2008	24	41	59	5
2008- 2009	32	48	50	7
2009-2010	23	36	58	6
2010-2011	22	50	48	4
2011-2012	24	31	68	9
2012-2013	30	32	69	8
2013-2014	29	37	70	5
2014-2015	22	49	84	3

**SOURCES OF ALL COMPLAINTS FILED WITH THE COMMISSION**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Attorneys</b>	<b>Investigative Counsel Initiated Inquiries</b>	<b>Inmates</b>	<b>Judges</b>	<b>Public</b>
2000-2001	14	1	29	0	76
2001-2002	4	4	26	0	1
2002-2003	6	6	35	0	91
2003-2004	6	1	17	0	70
2004-2005	2	7	33	0	70
2005-2006	12	4	30	0	62
2006-2007	7	2	27	0	81
2007-2008	5	4	29	0	91
2008-2009	6	5	35	0	91
2009-2010	4	4	25	0	90
2010-2011	8	2	17	0	97
2011-2012	8	7	19	0	98
2012-2013	13	2	13	2	109
2013-2014	7	4	21	0	109
2014-2015	8	9	38	0	103

### COMPLAINTS BY COURT

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>District Court Judges</b>	<b>Circuit Court Judges</b>	<b>Orphans' Court Judges</b>	<b>Court of Special Appeals Judges</b>	<b>Court of Appeals Judges</b>	<b>Other</b>
2000-2001	27	86	0	6	1	0
2001-2002	35	94	2	11	0	0
2002-2003	35	87	0	6	8	2
2003-2004	20	72	2	0	0	0
2004-2005	31	72	1	7	1	0
2005-2006	28	72	1	0	7	0
2006-2007	25	87	1	2	2	0
2007-2008	48	78	3	0	0	0
2008-2009	46	84	1	4	2	0
2009-2010	44	75	1	2	1	0
2010-2011	42	79	2	1	0	0
2011-2012	48	77	7	0	0	0
2012-2013	52	80	4	2	1	0
2013-2014	58	73	4	5	0	1
2014-2015	46	107	3	2	0	0