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THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
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Conference of Circuit Judges

MARYLAND JUDICIAL CENTER
187 HARRY S. TRUMAN PARKWAY
ANNAPOLIS, MD 21401

Meeting of the Conference of Circuit Judges

A meeting of the Conference of Circuit Judges was held Monday, January 27, 2025, via Zoom for Government, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Members Present

Hon. Fred S. Hecker, Chair
Hon. Yolanda L. Curtin, Vice-Chair

Matthew Barrett
Hon. James A. Bonifant
Hon. Audrey J.S. Carrión
Hon. DaNeeka V. Cotton
Hon. William W. Davis, Jr.
Hon. Heather S. DeWees

Hon. Wendy S. Epstein
Hon. Jeffrey S. Getty
Hon. Julia A. Martz-Fisher
Hon. Vicki M. Pauler
Hon. S. James Sarbanes
Hon. Brenda A. Sexton

Hon. Brian D. Shockley
Hon. Kevin R. Tucker
Hon. Anthony F. Vittoria
Hon. Lara C. Weathersbee

Also Present:

Unique Wright (staff)
Kelley O'Connor

Suzanne Pelz
Will Vormelker

1. Welcome Returning and New Members – *Hon. Fred S. Hecker*

Judge Hecker welcomed new members and outlined that the meeting would be brief. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved and adopted.

2. 2025 Conference Elections – *Hon. Fred S. Hecker*

Judge Hecker announced the nomination of Judge Curtin for vice-chair, with no additional nominations. A vote was held, and Judge Curtin was elected as the new vice-chair of the Conference of Circuit Judges.

3. Discussion of SB 46 – *Hon. DaNeeka Varner Cotton*

Judge Cotton discussed SB 46, which allows landlords to submit an affidavit directly to the Sheriff for renewals in certain cases. She expressed concerns about enforcement and mentioned forwarding the bill and her questions to the AOC for clarification. Judge Cotton emphasized the importance of judges being aware of the potential impact of the bill.

Judge Hecker asked if anyone else was familiar with the bill. No other judges had knowledge of it or offered comments.

4. For the Good of the Order

Judge Hecker shared that he receives weekly emails from Ms. Pelz detailing actions taken by the Legislative Committee on various bills. He inquired if others would be interested in receiving these emails. He also mentioned HB44, which addresses the election of circuit court judges, and noted that the Judiciary opposed this bill. He anticipated further legislation aligning with this bill. Additionally, Judge Hecker received an annual report from CASA, which he will forward. The report includes information on jurisdictions with CASA representatives, their accomplishments, and the program's associated costs.

Judge Cotton raised a question about the policy regarding immigration officers and their authority to apprehend defendants. Judge Carrion indicated that her jurisdiction does not have a formal written policy but follows a general practice. She plans to discuss the matter in an upcoming bench meeting. Judge Cotton inquired about other courts' practices concerning immigration officers at the courthouse. Judge Bonifant shared that in Montgomery County, defendants are generally released, and the Sheriff's Office escorts them downstairs. He mentioned an agreement between the county and ICE on custody arrangements and noted his intent to check with them.

Judge Bonifant raised concerns about what would happen if the Sheriff's Office refused to take defendants into custody. Judge Hecker expressed concerns about the impact on defendants' court appearances, as fear of ICE apprehension may cause people to avoid court. He suggested that judges check with their counties and detention centers for their policies. Judge Curtin recommended seeking input from Mr. Cox, as there could be legal implications of which the courts need to be aware. Judge Hecker agreed to reach out to Mr. Cox to gather more information or arrange for him to attend a future meeting. Judge Martz-Fisher shared that her jurisdiction's Sheriff's Department has worked with ICE for years, so their policy is not new. Judge Cotton mentioned that the County Attorney is meeting with legal staff to clarify whether the issue is related to an order or something else. Judge Carrión recalled that Mr. Cox provided guidance on this matter years ago, advising that if no orders were in place, the courts should not be involved.

Judge Hecker announced that for the March meeting, Dr. David Soulé from the Maryland Sentencing Commission will discuss updates regarding sentencing guidelines. Secretary Scruggs from the Department of Safety and Correctional Services has also been invited to speak about transportation and other inmate-related issues. Additionally, Judge Hecker spoke with the Committee on Complex Litigation or Business in Technology and plans to invite Justice Booth to discuss that topic.

The meeting concluded at 10:00 a.m. The next meeting will take place on Monday, March 24, 2025, via Zoom, starting at 9:30 a.m.