

STATE OF MARYLAND

BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL DISABILITIES

IN THE MATTER OF:

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CJD 2023-077

JUDGE JENNIFER ETHERIDGE

RESPONSE TO CHARGES

Jennifer Etheridge, Respondent, by her undersigned counsel, respectfully responds to the charges filed against her before the Commission on Judicial Disabilities.

General Response

Judge Etheridge recognizes and agrees that her conduct in this matter was inappropriate, and is sanctionable. She greatly regrets the unfortunate incident.

By way of explanation, and by no means as any excuse, she respectfully states:

She is the sole caregiver to her now 85-year-old mother, who, on the evening of the incident, was realizing the month of September was filled with upcoming one-year anniversaries which were greatly disturbing to her, namely the death of her husband of 64 years, their wedding anniversary, and her own birthday, Judge Etheridge stayed with her mother for approximately 4 hours, trying to comfort her. The time spent with her mother was stressful and trying.

Judge Etheridge's mother's home is near the restaurant of a family friend. Given the lateness of the hour, Judge Etheridge ascertained that the restaurant was still open, and sought a ride to her home. The judge's friend drove Judge Etheridge to her home. The vehicle was not allowed pass into the one-way street leading to Judge Etheridge's home, which was on a parallel one-way street, running in the opposite direction. The vehicle in which Judge Etheridge was riding did not have the appropriate sticker that would permit them to enter. Entry was denied despite Judge Etheridge providing proof of residency (Driver's License).

Judge Etheridge was frustrated at not being able to gain entry. She saw flashing lights down the street, and thus, for safety reasons, elected to walk to her home on the street where the entry was denied as there was a police presence which made her feel more comfortable as she was now walking alone after midnight, with two tote bags. The area in which Judge Etheridge resides has, in recent years, been experiencing an uptick in both crimes of opportunity and crimes of violence; hence her concern. The distance to her home would be approximately the same had she

walked down to her parallel street, one block down from the entry point.

While walking, she tripped and fell on the sidewalk. She was carrying a set of keys in her hand (for reasons of safety – to gain quick access to her home in the event of an emergency). When she tripped on the sidewalk and fell, one of the keys pierced her palm by about ¼ of an inch, causing a puncture wound, which bled profusely.

She also sustained injuries to her left leg, both knees, foot, and bruised chin. At the time a 1.5-liter unopened bottle of wine broke, spilling its contents all over her. This liquid went all over Judge Etheridge and permeated her clothing. Judge Etheridge continued home, cleaned off the blood, and made a makeshift bandage for her hand. After doing so, upset that the fall and thus the injuries had occurred, and feeling that would not have happened had the vehicle in which she was a passenger had been allowed admission into her neighborhood, she ventured back to the scene in the hopes of speaking with the officer and conveying her concern that residents should be allowed to enter if they show proof of residency, regardless of the vehicle they are in, so they are able to get to their homes safely. She saw the officers, and waited on the other side of the street until it appeared to her that they had either concluded, or had taken a break, in their investigation of the domestic dispute they had been engaged in resolving when she was first denied entry.

She now recognizes that her conduct regarding the police officers was inappropriate and improper. She had spent a frustrating evening trying to comfort her mother, which was compounded by the denial of entry to her neighborhood and her fall and subsequent injuries. It did not appear to her that the investigation was active at the time. She now realizes it was, and highly regrets any unintentional interference. She apologizes, and regrets the incident in its entirety.

In further answer, she regrets having described the transportation she took to her home as an Uber when it was her friend. She did this for ease of conversation but now sees that this was inappropriate. In approaching the police, she was concerned about both her own, and other residents' ability to gain entry into their neighborhood if they were in an Uber or any vehicle that did not have the appropriate permit sticker on the vehicle. She in no way intended to mislead law enforcement but recognizes in hindsight that her inaccuracy to the police officers was inappropriate.

In responding to the Commission, Judge Etheridge recognizes she had a duty to make certain that the response was true and accurate. Because she did not want to use any judicial resources in responding to, or in any way communicating with, counsel, she viewed the proposed letter response from her then lawyer on her cell phone. In it was a footnote, which the judge was unable to see on her cell phone. Judge Etheridge accepts and takes full responsibility that she, ultimately was the one who needed to do a full and final review of the response prior to signing off on it. She accepts full responsibility for her oversight. She does wish it to be known, however, that she in no way would ever wish to compare her own fears to what happened to Judge Wilkinson, and in no way would ever try, or attempt to try, to capitalize or gain any sympathy from the heinous act which led to Judge Wilkinson's passing. She truly regrets the mis-inclusion in the response.

This by no means is any criticism of her former lawyer whom she believed was acting in her best interest at all times. Unfortunately, there was a footnote contained in the letter that was not visible to her when she reviewed the draft on her cell phone. The footnote referred to the unfortunate death of Judge Wilkinson, which had not occurred at the time of her interactions with the police officers in her neighborhood.

In summation, Judge Etheridge recognizes that the response made her appear to be misleading the Commission. She at no time intended to mislead anyone, let alone the Commission. She did not see the footnote before signing the response. She understands it is her obligation to respond fully and accurately to the Commission and accepts full responsibility for failing to do so. She provides this information as an explanation for how it occurred as it was by no means intentional but in no way is the explanation intended to be an excuse. Rather, it was a conglomerate of her many conversations with prior counsel about her fears of walking alone at night in a neighborhood that had unfortunately been experiencing a spike in crime. Judge Etheridge wishes the Commission to know that she was, is, and always will be, absolutely dismayed that this misunderstanding was in the response, and that she did not "catch" its inclusion before signing the response.

Judge Etheridge has always desired to address both the Board and the Commission, and is prepared to address the Commission and explain to the best of her ability what occurred and

why. She accepts and acknowledges that her conduct in speaking to the police officers and displaying her business card was wholly and totally inappropriate.

By way of further answer, Judge Etheridge has been privileged to serve on the District Court of Maryland for over 12 years. In that time she has served the citizens of Baltimore City in an honorable and reputable way, having only received praise for her prior activities on the bench.

In Specific Answer

1. Subject to the General Answer, Judge Etheridge admits the allegations of paragraphs 1-6 of the Charges.

Respectfully Submitted,

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/s/ Jennifer Etheridge

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