



**BEFORE THE STATE COMMISSION
ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

CJC No. 19-0877

**PUBLIC WARNING
AND
ORDER OF ADDITIONAL EDUCATION**

**HONORABLE LISA R. WOODARD
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, PRECINCT 8
FORT WORTH, TARRANT COUNTY, TEXAS**

During its meeting on December 4-5, 2019, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations against the Honorable Lisa R. Woodard, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 8, Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas. Judge Woodard was advised by letter of the Commission's concerns and provided a written response. On October 6, 2020, Judge Woodard appeared before the Commission and gave testimony.

BACKGROUND

Judge Woodard and Fort Worth City Councilwoman Kelly Allen Gray were personal friends. During the 2019 election for Fort Worth City Council, Judge Woodard shared on her Facebook page a post and photograph of Ms. Gray, who was running for re-election. Judge Woodard posted "#teamkelly!" with the photograph, which was a hashtag used by Ms. Gray's supporters. On City Council election day, Judge Woodard "liked" a Facebook post that tagged Ms. Gray's Facebook page, which included a photograph of someone with Ms. Gray's campaign signs. The post stated in part "re-elect Kelly Allen Gray! Fort Worth City Council, -District 8. #teamkelly."

In November 2017, Ms. Gray appeared at court for mediation in cases that were pending in Judge Woodard's court.¹ While at the courthouse, Ms. Gray gave a campaign donation check for Judge Woodard to one of the court's administrative clerks, because she was unable to attend a fundraiser for Judge

¹ Judge Woodard later recused herself from Ms. Gray's cases when she became aware Ms. Gray was a party in those cases. Judge Woodard has since revised her court procedures so she will be notified of who the parties in cases are earlier in the process for the purposes of potential recusal.

Woodard that was scheduled a few days later. The clerk later gave the check to Judge Woodard at the fundraiser.

In her written responses to the Commission's inquiry, Judge Woodard denied her Facebook posts were endorsements but admitted her extrajudicial activities on Facebook cast reasonable doubt on her capacity to act impartially as a judge. The judge also confirmed the court administrative clerk's receipt of a campaign contribution from Ms. Gray.

During her appearance before the Commission, Judge Woodard stated she did not intend to endorse Ms. Gray, and posted the photograph of Ms. Gray and the hashtag #teamkelly to show her support as a friend for Ms. Gray during a difficult time for reasons unrelated to Ms. Gray's election campaign. Judge Woodard recognized people could have thought the post was an endorsement. Regarding the campaign contribution Ms. Gray made while at the courthouse, Judge Woodard said she did not know Ms. Gray was in court on November 17, 2019 or that Ms. Gray had given a campaign donation check to the administrative court clerk, until afterward. Nevertheless, Judge Woodard stated she felt she had to take responsibility for her actions.

After considering the evidence before it, the Commission enters the following Findings and Conclusion:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Honorable Lisa R. Woodard was the Justice of the Peace for Precinct 8 in Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas.
2. At all times relevant hereto, Judge Woodard and Fort Worth City Councilwoman Kelly Allen Gray were personal friends.
3. During the 2019 election for Fort Worth City Council, Judge Woodard shared on her Facebook page a post and photograph of Ms. Gray, who was running for re-election. Judge Woodard posted "#teamkelly!" with the photograph, which was a hashtag used by Ms. Gray's supporters.
4. On City Council election day, Judge Woodard "liked" a post that tagged Ms. Gray's Facebook page, which included a photograph of someone with Ms. Gray's campaign signs and included the hashtag "#teamkelly."
5. In November 2017, Ms. Gray appeared at court for mediation in cases that were pending in Judge Woodard's court, and in which she was a party. While there, Ms. Gray gave a campaign donation check for Judge Woodard to one of the court's administrative clerks.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

1. Canon 2B of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states, in pertinent part, that a judge shall not: "convey or permit others to convey the impression that they are in a special position to influence the judge."
2. Canon 4A(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states, in pertinent part: "A judge shall conduct all of the judge's extrajudicial activities so that they do not cast reasonable doubt on the judge's capacity to act impartially as a judge."
3. Canon 4D(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states, in pertinent part: "A judge shall refrain from financial and business dealings that tend to reflect adversely on the judge's impartiality."

4. Canon 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states, in pertinent part: “A judge or judicial candidate shall not authorize the public use of his or her name endorsing another candidate for any public office...”

CONCLUSION

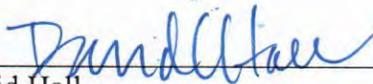
Based upon the record before it and the factual findings recited above, the Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that the Honorable Lisa R. Woodard, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 8, Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas, should be publicly warned and ordered to obtain additional education for; (i) her Facebook activities in support of Ms. Gray’s campaign for public office which could be viewed as endorsements of Ms. Gray and further, cast reasonable doubt on Judge Woodard’s capacity to act impartially as a judge in matters involving Ms. Gray before her court, in violation of Canons 4A(1) and Canon 5(2) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct; and, (ii) her court clerk’s acceptance of a campaign contribution from Ms. Gray at the courthouse, which could convey the impression that others were in a position to influence the judge, as well as constitute a failure to refrain from financial dealings that tend to reflect adversely on the judge’s impartiality, in violation of Canons 2B and 4D(1) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.

Pursuant to this Order, Judge Woodard must obtain **2 hours** of instruction with a mentor, in addition to her required judicial education for Fiscal Year 2021. In particular, the Commission desires that Judge Woodard receive this additional education in the area of judicial ethics generally, and specifically regarding a judge’s duty to maintain at all times the appearance of propriety and impartiality in all of the judge’s activities. Pursuant to the authority contained in §33.036 of the Texas Government Code, the Commission authorizes the disclosure of certain information relating to this matter to the Texas Center for the Judiciary to the extent necessary to enable that entity to assign the appropriate mentor for Judge Woodard.

Judge Woodard shall complete the additional **2 hours** of instruction recited above within **60 days** from the date of written notification from the Commission of the assignment of a mentor. Upon receiving such notice, it is Judge Woodard’s responsibility to contact the assigned mentor and schedule the additional education.

The Commission has taken this action pursuant to the authority conferred it in Article V, §1-a (8) of the Texas Constitution in a continuing effort to promote confidence in and high standards for the judiciary.

Issued this the 28 day of October, 2020.



David Hall
Chairman, State Commission on Judicial Conduct