

**BEFORE THE INVESTIGATIVE PANEL OF THE
FLORIDA JUDICIAL QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION**

INQUIRY CONCERNING A JUDGE,

JQC No. 2025-0647

HON. LAUREN PEFFER

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ANSWER TO FORMAL CHARGES

COMES NOW, Respondent, HONORABLE LAUREN PEFFER,
by and through her undersigned counsel, and hereby answers the
charges alleging violations of Canons 7A(3)(b) and 7A(3)(e) of the
Code of Judicial Conduct as follows:

Judge Peffer denies that she had a “win at all costs” attitude in
the judicial election as alleged in the Formal Charges. In 2024,
Judge Peffer was a first-time judicial candidate for a county court
seat in Broward County. After building a career as an animal rights
advocate and founding a non-profit animal rescue organization,
Judge Peffer ran for judicial office against a candidate known for his
work in child advocacy and criminal defense. Given their shared
commitment to the protection of vulnerable residents and their
mutual respect for each other’s work, Judge Peffer and her
opponent fostered a courteous, positive, and professional
relationship which lasted throughout the election and after.

Judge Peffer and her opponent often appeared together in interviews during their candidacy for the county court bench. In preparation for an interview with the Sun Sentinel, the judicial candidates were asked to reply to a questionnaire. The questionnaire asked about “three major challenges facing the judicial system in Broward County, Florida, or the U.S.” Judge Peffer answered that she believed the three major challenges in Broward County were “Ensuring Equity and Fair Treatment,” “Rebuilding Trust and Confidence,” and “Enhancing Public Awareness and Education.”

Within the same written answer, Judge Peffer elaborated that “recent revelations from the Ninth Circuit have highlighted an image crisis within the Florida’s judiciary.” She further explained that she believed it was important for “Broward County’s judiciary to set the standard for equitable and ethical treatment of its residents and constituents rebuilding trust and confidence in the judicial system is paramount and requires a commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct.”

During the interview with the editorial board of the Sun Sentinel, Judge Peffer was asked for examples of challenges facing

the judicial system. Judge Peffer recalled a book by a former courthouse employee that had a critical view of the justice system, and she referenced the book in response to the editorial board.

Judge Peffer did not read the book referenced in the Formal Charges. Judge Peffer did not intend to promote the validity of the book but instead, she intended to point to the book as an example of criticism of the judiciary.

Following the interview with the Sun Sentinel, and at the newspaper's request, Judge Peffer provided a link to the recording described in the Formal Charges, which had been forwarded to her by another lawyer. Judge Peffer had not carefully listened to the call but had a recollection that the judiciary was being criticized in the recording. Judge Peffer acknowledges that she should have more carefully listened to the recording before referencing it in her answers to the editorial board. In responding to these proceedings, Judge Peffer listened to the recordings without distraction, and it was immediately apparent that the purported phone call was a "deep fake."

Answer to enumerated formal charges:

1. Admitted.

- a. Admitted that Judge Peffer did not research the claims made by the Ninth Judicial Circuit employee before referencing it in her campaign.
- b. Admitted that Judge Peffer did not read the book and that she cited it as an example when asked during her interview with the editorial board.

2. Admitted that Judge Peffer briefly listened to the recording before providing a link to the editorial board. Admitted Judge Peffer heard the excerpt of the recording on page two of the Notice of Formal Charges. The rest of the paragraph is denied.

- a. Admitted that Judge Peffer did not attempt to ascertain whether the recording was fabricated before providing it to the Sun Sentinel.
- b. Denied.

3. Admitted that Judge Peffer attended the judicial election training presented by the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee (JEAC) and that she was taught to promote public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. Denied that Judge Peffer ignored the JEAC.

Admitted that Judge Peffer did not speak with the former Ninth Judicial Circuit employee or any of the judges or former judges identified in the book and recording. Admitted that Judge Peffer had not listened carefully to the entire recording before providing it to the editorial board. Admitted that Judge Peffer did not take steps to determine whether the recording was legitimate and now having listened to it more recently, she recognizes it was fabricated. Denied that Judge Peffer helped facilitate the former employee's farce.

Judge Peffer denies that she violated the Code of Judicial Conduct.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Scott K. Tozian

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a true and correct copy of the foregoing Answer to Formal Charges has been furnished by e-mail, fourteen (14) copies have been mailed via Federal Express to the address noted below, and has been e-filed through the Florida Courts E-filing portal to: Blan L. Teagle, Esquire (bteagle@floridajqc.com), Executive Director, Alexander J. Williams, Esquire (awilliams@floridajqc.com) General Counsel, and Henry M. Cox III, Esquire, Special Counsel, Brian T. Coughlin, Esquire, (hmc@bedellfirm.com) and (btc@bedellfirm.com), at the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission, 2425 Mill Creek Road, Suite 2, Tallahassee, Florida 32308, this 13th day of June, 2025.

/s/ Scott K. Tozian

SCOTT K. TOZIAN, ESQUIRE