

**IN THE SUPREME COURT
STATE OF FLORIDA**

INQUIRY CONCERNING A JUDGE,
THE HONORABLE MARTHA ADAMS

SC2025-
JQC NO. 2024-796

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF DISCIPLINE

Procedural History

In October 2024, the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission (the "JQC") served a Notice of Investigation on Orange County Judge Martha Adams, pursuant to Rule 6(b) of the Florida Judicial Qualification Commission Rules ("FJQC Rules"). On December 12, 2024, Judge Adams appeared before the Investigative Panel of the Commission with counsel, and provided testimony under oath, in response to the Notice of Investigation. During that hearing, Judge Adams admitted that her conduct with regard to the violations described in the Notice of Formal Charges did not meet the high standards required by the Code of Judicial Conduct, and at the conclusion of the hearing, the Investigative Panel voted to find probable cause and proceed with the institution of formal charges, pursuant to FJQC Rule 6(f).

The Charges

The charges for which the Investigative Panel found probable cause relate to bias and intemperate conduct in violation of Canons 1, 2A, 3B(4) and 3B(5) of the Code of Judicial Conduct.

Code of Judicial Conduct

Canon 1 of the Code of Judicial Conduct provides that “[a] Judge Shall Uphold the Integrity and Independence of the Judiciary.” Canon 2 requires that “[a] Judge Shall Avoid Impropriety and the Appearance of Impropriety in all of the Judge’s Activities.” Canon 3B(4) provides that judge “shall be patient, dignified and courteous to litigants, jurors, witnesses, lawyers and others with whom the judge deals in an official capacity...” and Canon 3B(5) further requires that “a judge shall perform judicial duties without bias and prejudice.”

Factual Findings

While presiding over criminal cases in the Orange County, Judge Adams exhibited biased, impatient, undignified, and discourteous behavior regarding the staff and management of the Ninth Circuit State Attorney’s Office (SAO). Judge Adams, frustrated with what she believed were certain

administrative and procedural issues in the State Attorney's Office (SAO), made inappropriate comments that evinced bias, including:

1. Referring to an Assistant State Attorney (ASA) as an "ass" while presiding in court.
2. Displaying bias against the SAO by informing a group of ASAs that if their supervisor were going to make your life a shambles then you would do the same to him.
3. Evincing further bias by expressing your belief that the SAO was conspiring to remove you from the criminal bench and further stating that you would have to start being a "bitch" in regard to your rulings, presumably to the detriment of the SAO and its cases.

By her written response to the Notice of Investigation, her sworn oral testimony before the Investigative Panel, and by the execution of a Stipulation filed concurrently with these Findings and Recommendations, Judge Adams has agreed to and admitted the facts and circumstances described in the Notice of Formal Charges, and in these Findings, and she has agreed that her actions constitute violations of Canons 1, 2A, 3B(4) and 3B(5) of the Code of Judicial Conduct. Finally, she has agreed that these

charges are supported by clear and convincing evidence, and that she should receive the recommended discipline.

Therefore, in light of Judge Adams' admissions, and the Commission's own investigation, the Commission finds that Judge Adams violated Canons 1, 2A, 3B(4) and 3B(5) through the course of conduct outlined above, and that these findings are supported by clear and convincing evidence.

Mitigation

Judge Adams has been on the bench since 2007 and has no prior discipline with the Commission and no prior complaints of this nature. Judge Adams has no prior discipline with the Florida Bar. She admitted to her misconduct and has cooperated with the Commission in all respects during this inquiry. She has expressed deep regret that her conduct could have eroded the public's perception of the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. At the Commission's behest, Judge Adams has also sent letters of apology to the individuals most specifically affected by her behavior and requested and received a transfer out of the Criminal Division. She hopes to rectify her misconduct, in part, by taking responsibility for her misconduct, and accepting the sanction recommended below.

Recommendation as to Discipline

Judge Adams' behavior, and particularly her expressions of bias and promises of future bias against the Ninth Circuit SAO, failed to uphold the integrity of the judiciary and failed to maintain the impartiality required by the Canons.

Judge Adams and the Commission have entered into a Stipulation, recommending that this Court issue a public reprimand of Judge Adams. The Commission believes that this penalty will serve to deter future misconduct by Judge Adams.

Accordingly, the Commission finds and recommends that the interests of justice, the public welfare, and sound judicial administration will be well served by a public reprimand of Judge Martha Adams.

Dated this 28th day of February 2025.

**THE FLORIDA JUDICIAL
QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION**

By: _____ /s
Hon. Gary Flower
Vice Chair of the FJQC
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