



**BEFORE THE
STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

CJC No. 05-0201-DI

PUBLIC ADMONITION

**HONORABLE FAITH JOHNSON
363RD JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT
DALLAS, DALLAS COUNTY, TEXAS**

During its regularly scheduled meeting on April 13-15, 2005, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations against the Honorable Faith Johnson, Judge of the 363rd Judicial District Court, in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas. Judge Johnson was advised by letter of the Commission's concerns and provided a written response. Judge Johnson appeared with counsel before the Commission on April 15, 2005, and gave testimony. After considering the evidence before it, the Commission entered the following Findings and Conclusion:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. At all times relevant hereto, the Honorable Faith Johnson was Judge of the 363rd District Court in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas.
2. In November 2003, Billy Wayne Williams (hereinafter referred to as "Williams") was convicted by a jury of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.
3. After being placed on a personal recognizance (PR) bond when his attorney withdrew from the case, Williams fled the jurisdiction of the court before he could be sentenced.
4. Upon learning that Williams had fled, Judge Johnson sentenced him *in absentia* to life in prison.
5. Approximately one year later, Williams was recaptured.

6. When Judge Johnson learned that Williams had been apprehended, she told members of her staff that she was going to pick up a cake and some ice cream to celebrate his return. Her court reporter volunteered to bring streamers and balloons.
7. On October 25, 2004, Judge Johnson's staff decorated her courtroom with streamers and balloons, as the judge laughed and gave instructions on where to place the decorations. A cake, decorated with the words, "Welcome Home Billy Ray Williams," was displayed on a table in the courtroom.
8. A local Dallas news reporter was also present, at Judge Johnson's request, to film the party preparations and Williams' expression as he entered the courtroom and witnessed the celebration.
9. As Williams approached the bench, Judge Johnson told him, "You just made my day when I heard you had finally come home. We're so excited to see you, we're throwing a party for you."
10. Williams was then told by the judge that when he fled the court's jurisdiction mid-trial, she had sentenced him in his absence to life in prison. Williams was then escorted out of the courtroom, stating to a reporter, "It seems like everyone wants to have a party, and it's fun for you people, but not for me."
11. Approximately forty minutes later, after the courtroom had been cleared of the party decorations, Williams was brought before Judge Johnson again for formal sentencing.
12. Judge Johnson's courtroom celebration received world-wide media attention, with the judge receiving both praise and criticism for her actions.
13. In her testimony before the Commission, Judge Johnson stated that she regretted having thrown the party and apologized if her actions offended anyone.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

1. Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution provides that any Texas judge may be disciplined for conduct that casts public discredit upon the judiciary.
2. Canon 3B(3) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct states, in pertinent part: "A judge shall require order and decorum in proceedings before the judge."

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the facts and evidence before it, the Commission concludes that Judge Johnson failed to maintain order and decorum in the courtroom, in violation of Canon 3B(3) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, when she celebrated Billy Ray Williams' apprehension with balloons, streamers, cake and ice cream, and when she promoted the event by inviting the media to capture Williams' bewildered expression as he entered the courtroom and observed the celebration. The judge's actions in this case were willful and cast public discredit upon the judiciary, in violation of Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution.

In condemnation of the conduct described above that violated Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution and Canon 3B(3) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, it is the Commission's decision to issue a **PUBLIC ADMONITION** to the Honorable Faith Johnson, Judge of the 363rd District Court, in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas.

Pursuant to the authority contained in Article V, Section 1-a(8) of the Texas Constitution, it is ordered that the actions described above be made the subject of a **PUBLIC ADMONITION** by the Commission.

The Commission has taken this action in a continuing effort to protect public confidence in the judicial system and to assist the state's judiciary in its efforts to embody the principles and values set forth in the Texas Constitution and the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct.

Issued this the 29th day of April, 2005.

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

Honorable James A. Hall, Chair
State Commission on Judicial Conduct