



**BEFORE THE STATE COMMISSION
ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**

CJC No. 25-0319

PUBLIC REPRIMAND

**HONORABLE NATALIA “NATA” CORNELIO
351ST CRIMINAL DISTRICT COURT
HOUSTON, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

During its meeting on October 1-2, 2025, the State Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded a review of the allegations in the above-referenced complaint against the Honorable Natalia “Nata” Cornelio, judge of the 351st Criminal District Court in Houston, Harris County, Texas. Judge Cornelio was advised by letter of the Commission’s concerns and provided a written response. On October 2, 2025, Judge Cornelio appeared before the Commission and gave testimony regarding this matter.

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 Natalia “Nata” Cornelio was the judge of the 351st Criminal District Court in Houston, Harris County, Texas.
2. The Commission initiated this complaint in December of 2024 based on news reports about a recusal motion filed against Judge Cornelio seeking her removal from the capital murder appeal filed by death row inmate Ronald Lee Haskell (“Haskell”).¹
3. On June 27, 2024, Judge Cornelio signed a bench warrant to transport Haskell for his MRI (the “Bench Warrant”) that read, in relevant part, “The case is set on the court docket for July 22, 2024, at 12:00 a.m. in the Harris County District Court listed above,” even though no court proceeding was scheduled in *State of Texas v. Ronald Lee Haskell*, Case No. 1434395 (the “Haskell Case”).

¹ In 2019, Haskell was convicted of murdering six members of his ex-wife’s family and sentenced to death.

4. The State learned about the Bench Warrant from a survivor of Haskell's attack, who received notification from the Texas Victim Information and Notification Everyday ("VINE") system that Haskell was transferred to the Harris County Jail for a court proceeding, and in turn, on August 29, 2024, the State subpoenaed Haskell's transport logs.
5. On September 12, 2024, Haskell filed a motion to quash the State's subpoena (the "Motion to Quash"). On Saturday, September 14, 2024, finding the State sought to "invade matters protected by privilege", Judge Cornelio granted the motion and quashed the subpoena without affording the State an opportunity to be heard.
6. On October 27, 2024, the Harris County District Attorney's Office (the "HCD AO" or the "State") filed a recusal motion in the Haskell Case accusing Judge Cornelio of bias and misconduct.²
7. The recusal motion (the "Recusal Motion") alleged that in June of 2024, in connection with her decision to grant Haskell's *ex parte* requests for an MRI and the related transportation, Judge Cornelio:
 - (a) issued a bench warrant for Haskell to be transported for a court setting knowing the information to be false;
 - (b) issued the *ex parte* travel orders in a "cloak and dagger" manner that prevented the State from challenging her actions;
 - (c) quashed the State's subpoena seeking information about the matter without affording the State an opportunity to be heard; and
 - (d) exhibited a "high degree of favoritism" towards Haskell in her handling of the case.
8. After conducting several hearings and/or status conferences on the Recusal Motion and other related issues, Judge Susan Brown, the presiding judge of the Eleventh Administrative Judicial Region, granted the Recusal Motion and removed Judge Cornelio from the Haskell Case on January 15, 2025.
9. During her appearance before the Commission, Judge Cornelio did not dispute any of the Findings of Fact identified above.
10. Judge Cornelio acknowledged the Bench Warrant contained inaccurate information about a nonexistent court appearance. Judge Cornelio explained her staff used a standard electronic form for the Bench Warrant and, as is a common practice in Harris County, identified a docket setting even though the defendant was not going to appear in court. Judge Cornelio admitted she "should have been more careful about the details of the form [she] was signing" and that it was ultimately her responsibility to ensure the Bench Warrant did not contain misleading information.
11. Judge Cornelio stated that she has taken steps to ensure a situation such as this does not occur again, including changing her processes and requiring both parties to appear before issuing a bench warrant.

² The HCD AO previously sought Judge Cornelio's recusal from the case based on a conversation she had with an assistant district attorney prior to assuming the bench during which she called Haskell "sick", but the motion was denied.

12. Judge Cornelio acknowledged she granted the Motion to Quash on a Saturday without setting a hearing or inviting the parties to brief the issues. Judge Cornelio indicated she no longer rules on motions without either holding a hearing or confirming the parties do not want a hearing.

RELEVANT STANDARDS AND AUTHORITIES

1. Canon 3B(5) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides, “A judge shall perform judicial duties without bias or prejudice.”
2. Canon 3B(6) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides, in relevant part, “A judge shall not, in the performance of judicial duties, by words or conduct manifest bias or prejudice, ...”
3. Canon 3B(8) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct provides, in relevant part, “A judge shall accord to every person who has a legal interest in a proceeding, or that person’s lawyer, the right to be heard according to law.”
4. Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution provides, in relevant part, that a judge shall not engage in “willful or persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of the [judge’s] duties or casts public discredit upon the judiciary or on the administration of justice.”

CONCLUSION

Based upon the record before it and the factual findings recited above, the Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that Honorable Natalia “Nata” Cornelio, judge of the 351st Criminal District Court in Houston, Harris County, Texas, should be publicly reprimanded for: (i) performing her judicial duties with bias, and manifesting by words or conduct bias in the performance of her judicial duties towards Haskell when she signed and issued the Bench Warrant knowing it contained false information about a nonexistent court appearance; and (ii) failing to afford the State an opportunity to be heard on the Motion to Quash. Judge Cornelio’s failures in the foregoing respects constituted willful and persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of her judicial duties and cast public discredit on the judiciary and on the administration of justice, in violation of Canons 3B(5), 3B(6) and 3B(8) of the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct, and Article V, Section 1-a(6)A of the Texas Constitution.

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

Issued this the 10 day of October, 2025.



Carey Walker
Secretary, State Commission on Judicial Conduct