

PUBLIC ADMONISHMENT OF JUDGE MELISSA N. WIDDIFIELD

The Commission on Judicial Performance has ordered Judge Melissa N. Widdifield publicly admonished pursuant to article VI, section 18(d) of the California Constitution and commission rule 115, as set forth in the following statement of facts and reasons found by the commission:

STATEMENT OF FACTS AND REASONS

Judge Widdifield has been a judge of the Los Angeles County Superior Court since August 2007. She was a court commissioner for five years before her appointment as a superior court judge.

On November 18, 2009, at approximately 1:00 a.m., Judge Widdifield drove her vehicle in a reckless manner while under the influence of alcohol, and with a blood alcohol level of approximately .09 percent. On January 19, 2010, the judge was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol, a violation of Vehicle Code section 23152(a), and driving while having a .08 percent or higher blood alcohol level, a violation of Vehicle Code section 23152(b). On May 14, 2010, the judge entered a plea of nolo contendere to reckless driving, a violation of Vehicle Code section 23103(a), pursuant to Vehicle Code section 23103.5.

Judge Widdifield's unlawful action described above evidences a serious disregard of the principles of personal and official conduct embodied in the California Code of Judicial Ethics, including failure to observe high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of the judiciary will be preserved (canon 1) and failure to respect and comply with the law and act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary (canon 2A). "Public confidence in the judiciary is eroded by irresponsible or improper conduct by judges." (Canon 2A advisory committee commentary.) Judge Widdifield's conduct was also prejudicial to the administration of justice and brought the judicial office into disrepute within the meaning of article VI, section 18, subdivision (d) of the California Constitution.

Commission members Hon. Judith D. McConnell, Hon. Katherine Feinstein, Hon. Frederick P. Horn, Mr. Anthony P. Capozzi, Mr. Peter E. Flores, Jr., Ms. Barbara Schraeger, Mr. Lawrence Simi, Ms. Maya Dillard Smith and Mr. Nathaniel Trives voted to impose a public admonishment. Commission member Ms. Sandra Talcott was recused from this matter. Commission member Mr. Samuel A. Hardage did not participate.

December 14, 2010