

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE
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FOR RELEASE
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JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE COMMISSION ISSUES DECISION AND ORDER
IMPOSING PUBLIC ADMONISHMENT ON JUDGE ELIZABETH W. JOHNSON
PURSUANT TO STIPULATION

The Commission on Judicial Performance has issued a decision and order imposing public admonishment on Judge Elizabeth W. Johnson of the Trinity County Superior Court pursuant to stipulation. Following a preliminary investigation, Judge Johnson, through her counsel James A. Murphy, and trial counsel for the commission, proposed a Stipulation for Discipline by Consent pursuant to Commission Rule 116.5. The Decision and Order Imposing Public Admonishment is issued pursuant to that Stipulation, which was approved by the commission.

As part of the Stipulation, Judge Johnson agreed to resign from the bench effective January 18, 2018, and not to seek or hold judicial office in the future. Judge Johnson was issued a public admonishment by the commission for the following misconduct.

Judge Johnson made a material misrepresentation to the commission during a prior investigation. Specifically, in March 2014, Judge Johnson represented that she and her husband continued to make payments on a Community Development Block Grant loan from Trinity County. In fact, they stopped making payments on the loan after August 2013, and did not make another payment for more than two years.

On fourteen separate occasions, Judge Johnson improperly used her court credit card in violation of Judicial Council policies, including for personal purposes unrelated to court business. The fourteen charges totaled \$740.22.

Also, Judge Johnson frequently arrived to court after the calendar over which she presided was scheduled to start, including arriving 30 minutes later for her calendar on three occasions. Judge Johnson's tardiness inconvenienced parties, attorneys, and court personnel.

On two separate occasions, contrary to the provisions of the California Rules of Court, Judge Johnson revised the Trinity County Superior Court local rules without providing the public and local legal community with notice of, and an opportunity to comment on, the rule changes.

In addition, in an August 2015 minute order, Judge Johnson appointed her former law partner to represent a conservatee in a matter pending before her. Judge Johnson failed to make any disclosure in the order. At the next hearing in the matter, Judge Johnson did not disqualify herself from the case or disclose her prior partnership relationship with the attorney.

In imposing the public admonishment, the commission stated that Judge Johnson's multiple acts of misconduct undermine public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary, and that Judge Johnson's misrepresentation to the commission is particularly serious misconduct. The commission further commented that the judge's misconduct "reflects a pattern or inability to abide by basic rules and ethical standards required of all judges."

The commission's Decision and Order of Public Admonishment is available on the commission's website at <http://cjp.ca.gov> (under "Pending Cases - Press Releases & Documents" and "Public Discipline & Decisions") and at the commission's office. Judge Johnson is represented by Attorney James A. Murphy of San Francisco.

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The commission is composed of six public members, three judges and two lawyers. The chairperson is Hon. Ignazio J. Ruvolo of the Court of Appeal, First Appellate District. Commission member Hon. Michael B. Harper is recused from this matter.

For further information about the Commission on Judicial Performance, see the commission's website at <http://cjp.ca.gov>.