

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE

IN THE MATTER CONCERNING
JUDGE THOMAS J. GRIEGO

DECISION AND ORDER IMPOSING
PUBLIC ADMONISHMENT

This disciplinary matter concerns Judge Thomas J. Griego, a judge of the Los Angeles County Superior Court since 2015. His current term began in 2021. Pursuant to rule 114 of the Rules of the Commission on Judicial Performance, Judge Griego and his attorney, Joanna L. Storey Mishler, appeared before the commission on May 6, 2026, to contest the imposition of a tentative public admonishment issued on December 18, 2025. Judge Griego waived his right to formal proceedings under rule 118 and to review by the Supreme Court. Having considered the written and oral objections and argument submitted by Judge Griego and his counsel, and good cause appearing, the Commission on Judicial Performance issues this public admonishment pursuant to article VI, section 18(d) of the California Constitution, based upon the statement of facts and reasons set forth below.

I. Poor Demeanor Towards Small Claims Litigants

Judge Griego displayed poor demeanor toward pro per small claims litigants, on three different days, and in four different matters.

Guo v. Herrera

On May 1, 2024, Judge Griego presided over *Amy Fang Guo v. Laura Marie Herrera* (No. 24STSC00882), a dispute that arose from a traffic accident. Both parties appeared, in pro per.

At the beginning of the hearing, Judge Griego summarized the plaintiff's claim, and asked Ms. Guo to confirm. She began to speak, in accented English.

After she stated that she had sued a California Highway Patrol officer, the judge asked if she had a case number for that lawsuit. As Ms. Guo began to recite the case number, the judge interrupted her, saying “Please give her [the judicial assistant] the number.” (Audio Part 1 at 02:14-02:15.) Ms. Guo recited the case number to the judicial assistant, Tonsha Kelley, who then searched for the case in the court’s case management system.

Judge Griego reviewed the status of Ms. Guo’s civil claim, *Amy Fang Guo v. Victor Hernandez* (No. 23STLC07203), and then observed that the defendant had filed a demurrer,¹ which Commissioner Latrice Byrdsong sustained. The judge said to Ms. Guo:

Court: And you sued, you sued the law enforcement officer, whose name is Victor Hernandez.

Ms. Guo: That’s the --

Court: And let me finish. And you got an attorney -- the deputy attorney Chen -- who came in and said that your lawsuit means nothing. That’s what a demurrer is. He filed a demurrer. And a demurrer, in plain language, means the case is worthless.

Ms. Guo: [inaudible]

Court: Let me finish.

Ms. Guo: Ok.

Court: And guess what, the commissioner agreed with the attorney general that your case did not rise to the level of a case -- it’s worthless. That’s what her rulings said. Understand?

¹ A demurrer is a means to object to a civil complaint as facially defective. (Code Civ. Proc., § 430.10.) For example, a demurrer may object on the grounds that the court has no jurisdiction over the cause of action (*id.* at subd. (a)), or because the pleading does not state sufficient facts to state a claim (*id.* at subd. (e)).

(Audio Part 1 at 06:07-06:55.) Ms. Guo attempted to respond, and the judge interrupted her, saying, “Well let me finish and then I’ll let you say something.” (Audio Part 1 at 06:58-07:00.)

On six occasions during the hearing, Judge Griego stated that Commissioner Byrdsong’s ruling granting the demurrer in *Guo v. Hernandez* meant that Ms. Guo’s civil case “mean[t] nothing.” (Audio Part 1 at 06:27, 08:41-08:43, 08:52-08:54; Audio Part 2 at 02:38, 02:56, 15:49.) After establishing that Ms. Guo had filed a notice of appeal, he said to her, “The demurrer was granted, which means that your position on the case is wrong.” When Ms. Guo began to respond, the judge said, “Listen. I know what I’m talking about, okay?” (Audio Part 1 at 08:21-08:35.)

Judge Griego asked Ms. Guo several times if she understood that she had appealed the commissioner’s decision. After she answered that she “kn[ew] exactly what [she was] doing,” (Audio Part 1 at 9:59-10:01) he responded:

Well, I beg to differ, because there’s been another bench officer who’s ruled that you’re wrong. So[,] I’m not so sure if you know what you’re doing. It’s already on record that your lawsuit is wrong. It’s already on record. Right? In other words, what you presented does not make sense. That’s what the commissioner decided. That’s what a demur -- you’re not a lawyer, right?

(Audio Part 1 at 10:04-10:27.)

Ms. Guo responded to Judge Griego’s question about whether she was a lawyer by saying that she had been studying law. (Audio Part 1 at 10:29-10:32.) The judge then asked her, “Are you a lawyer, yes or no?” two times. (Audio Part 1 at 10:35-10:39.) When Ms. Guo attempted to respond, the judge interrupted her and said that he needed a break. The judge said, “Ms. Kelley, you know what to do.” (Audio Part 1 at 10:46-10:47.) Ms. Kelley then said, presumably to Ms. Guo

or both parties, that they should answer the question the judge asked. (Audio Part 1 at 10:48-10:52.) Judge Griego left the courtroom. The case went off the record.

When the case resumed, Judge Griego said:

Court: Okay, we're back on the record in case number 10 on the court's calendar, ending in number 00882, *Amy Guo vs. Laura Maria [sic] Herrera*.

Ms. Guo: Thank you so much, Your Honor.

Court: Let me finish, geez. Now, did you talk to the woman?

Ms. Kelley: I did, Your Honor. I did.

Court: Do you want me to put this to this afternoon, yes or no?

Ms. Guo: No.

Court: You're in my courtroom. Not your courtroom.

(Audio Part 2 at 00:33-01:08.)

The judge summarized the status of Ms. Guo's civil case and said he had to decide whether the case before him was a related case. He then turned to the defendant and said, "Is that generally what's going on, Ms. Herrera?" Ms. Herrera said, "Thank you, Your Honor —" and the judge interrupted her, saying, "Is that generally what's going on, yes or no?" (Audio Part 2 at 04:43-04:52.)

Judge Griego asked Ms. Guo whether she had "any statutory authority ... or caselaw that says that I should keep it [her small claims complaint] here rather than keep it in limited jurisdiction before Judge [sic] Byrdsong, go ahead, yes or no, again, very specific?" (Audio Part 2 at 05:30-05:51.) Ms. Guo appeared confused by the question. The judge repeated his request for caselaw or statutory authority multiple times. Ms. Guo said, "Vehicle codes," (Audio Part 2

at 06:46) and the judge apparently obtained a printed copy of the California Vehicle Code. He then said, "The Vehicle Code is this big, which section do you want me to read?" (Audio Part 2 at 08:16-08:17.) Ms. Guo did not appear to understand the question. The judge said:

Court: Okay. Okay. Are you saying, oh I see of all these numbers, you want me to look at all of these, to say that you have the -- that I -- that this judge should hear your case, right? I'll -- I'll -- I'll indulge you. You have section 2008 [sic]. It doesn't say that. I know this section, hold on. I'll go to the next section. 20009. It doesn't say anything about jurisdiction. I'll go to the next section. Perjury. Penal Code. Well, this is not the Penal Code, this is the Vehicle Code, so I'm not even going to look at that. You have Government Code section 820, which is not the Vehicle Code, it's a Government Code, I'm not going to look at that. You have Government Code section 822.2, that has nothing to do with the Vehicle Code, that's a Government Code. Let me finish, you gave it to me. Vehicle Code section 21658, okay, that has nothing to do with jurisdiction. That's whether or not you should drive on the right side of the vehicle. Vehicle Code section 21750, that's a passing rule. Nothing about jurisdiction. Vehicle Code section 22350, that's speeding. Nothing to do with whether or not I have jurisdiction. Evidence Code, not relevant. Civil Code, it's defamation law -- it doesn't, it doesn't speak to, you know to, my jurisdiction. Again -- listen to my question. Do you have a code section that says I, uh, that I cannot transfer it to -- *back* to Commissioner Byrdsong, yes or no?

Ms. Guo: Ye-- No. Sorry, can you please repeat?

Court: I'll say it again. And then I'm going to let Ms. Kelley take you outside. Do you have a, a, a code -- there are 21 codes in California. The Utility Code, Government Code, Civil Code, lots of codes. And that's just a fancy word for law. Do you have a law that says I must hear your case, and not send it back to Commissioner Byrdsong?

Ms. Guo: There's two different case [sic]. Different case.

Court: Do you have a code section, ma'am? Can you give me a code?

Ms. Guo: Is there any small claims says I cannot try the code -- this case in small claims court -- case [*sic*]?

Court: I'm asking you -- can you, can you point -- the way law works is, you give the judge authority. Show the judge what he can or can't do. Okay, can you -- do you have a code section that says --

Ms. Guo: Sorry, I don't.

Court: Well then why didn't you say that in the first place? Because you don't know. The answer is, you're wrong, ma'am.

Ms. Guo: I'm sorry.

Court: I have the power to transfer this case. That's, my job. Even though you think otherwise.

(Audio Part 2 at 09:08-12:35.)

The judge asked Ms. Herrera whether she objected to his relating the small claims case to the civil case. She said that she did not. (Audio Part 2 at 14:19-14:24.) He then addressed Ms. Guo, asking her twice whether she understood. (Audio Part 2 at 14:37-14:43.) When Ms. Guo attempted to answer, the judge interrupted her. She had not stated a position as to the relating of the cases.

Ms. Guo: Can I please --

Court: ... In other words, in life, you don't get what you want. You want your cake, and eat it too, right? You want to have your case over there going on, and then you want me to decide your small claims court [*sic*]. Sorry. I decide otherwise. Even though you don't like it. I decide otherwise. That's the reality -- no matter what you said or what you're gonna say, you're not gonna convince me otherwise.

[Be]cause I think I made a pretty good record as to why I'm doing this. In other words, you can't have both cases going on at the same time. What don't you understand about that?

(Audio Part 2 at 16:02-16:51.)

Shortly after this exchange, Ms. Guo said that the "cause[s] of action" in the two matters were different. (Audio Part 2 at 17:30-17:33.) Judge Griego explained to the parties that he intended to transfer the small claims case to Commissioner Byrdsong. Ms. Guo then consented. (Audio Part 2 at 17:37-18:24.) The hearing concluded.

After the hearing, Judge Griego did not order *Guo v. Herrera* related to *Guo v. Hernandez*. Instead, *Guo v. Herrera* was continued for a status hearing to get an update on Ms. Guo's appeal in *Guo v. Hernandez*. After two additional continuances, and while Ms. Guo's appeal in *Guo v. Hernandez* was still pending, another judge ruled in favor of Ms. Guo in *Guo v. Herrera*, awarding her \$530.56, following a hearing the defendant did not attend.

In his response to the commission's preliminary investigation (PI) letter, Judge Griego expressed regret for his choice of words when he referred to Ms. Guo as "the woman," and when he used the word "worthless" to describe Ms. Guo's civil claim. He otherwise denied that his conduct during this hearing was improper.

The commission found that, by stating that Commissioner Byrdsong's decision granting the demurrer meant that Ms. Guo's case was "worthless," "meant nothing," or was "wrong," Judge Griego's conduct was discourteous and disparaging, in violation of his duties under canon 3B(4), and his words incorrectly implied that the commissioner had issued a ruling on the merits of the claim. The judge's remark, "So[,] I'm not so sure if you know what you're doing," was also discourteous and gratuitous.

In his objections to the Notice of Tentative Public Admonishment (Notice), Judge Griego argued that when he interrupted Ms. Guo, he was trying to get her

back on point when she failed to answer his questions. While the audio recording reflects that Ms. Guo sometimes started to speak over Judge Griego, or did not appear to fully understand what information the judge was seeking from her, it also reflects Judge Griego's immediate frustration and impatience with her, and that he interrupted her multiple times when she appeared to be sincerely attempting to answer his questions. By interrupting Ms. Guo multiple times, including when she was attempting to answer his questions, the judge's conduct was impatient, undignified, and discourteous.

The commission found that, by asking Ms. Guo multiple times if she was a lawyer, interrupting Ms. Herrera, and making comments such as "Let me finish, geez," and "You're in my courtroom. Not your courtroom," Judge Griego's conduct was impatient, undignified, discourteous, and gratuitous (canon 3B(4)). By saying to his judicial assistant, "Ms. Kelley, you know what to do," and, later, asking her if she had "talk[ed] to the woman," referring to Ms. Guo, the judge's conduct was undignified, demeaning, and discourteous (canon 3B(4)).

The commission found that Judge Griego's conduct during his exchange with Ms. Guo about the Vehicle Code, including interrupting Ms. Guo when she attempted to answer his question, and remarking, "You want your cake, and eat it too, right? You want to have your case over there going on, and then you want me to decide your small claims court [*sic*] ... no matter what you said or what you're gonna say, you're not gonna convince me otherwise ... What don't you understand about that?" as described above, was discourteous, demeaning, undignified, and impatient (canon 3B(4)).

The commission determined that when Judge Griego said, "Do you want me to put this to this afternoon, yes or no?" after the plaintiff had said "Thank you so much, Your Honor," and when he said, after Ms. Guo asked him to repeat a question, "I'll say it again, and then I'm going to let Ms. Kelley take you outside," his words suggested that he was improperly and punitively threatening to continue the case.

The commission found that, by interrupting Ms. Guo on multiple occasions and making remarks that suggested he was improperly threatening to continue the case, Judge Griego violated his duties to accord every person who has a legal interest in a proceeding the full right to be heard according to law (canon 3B(7)); and to manage his courtroom in a manner that provides all litigants the opportunity to have their matters fairly adjudicated in accordance with the law (canon 3B(8)). His conduct also violated his duties to establish, maintain, and enforce high standards of conduct, and personally observe those standards to preserve the integrity and independence of the judiciary (canon 1); to hear and decide all matters assigned to him (canon 3B(1)); to act in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary (canon 2A); and to avoid impropriety in all activities (canon 2).

Beck v. New World Investments LLC

On July 15, 2024, Judge Griego presided over *Elvina Beck v. New World Investments LLC* (No. 23STSC02423). Ms. Beck had sued her commercial landlord, New World Investments, for the partial return of her security deposit. New World Investments had counter-sued for the cost of fire sprinkler installation. Ms. Beck and Jay Chen, the defendant's authorized representative, appeared at the hearing. The case had been pending since May 2023. On September 25, 2023; December 20, 2023; March 22, 2024; and May 24, 2024, the parties appeared for hearing, but Judge Griego was absent, and the parties did not stipulate to having the matter heard by a judge pro tem.

At the beginning of the hearing, Judge Griego addressed the defendant, asking him for clarification about a request for order. The plaintiff attempted to interject. Judge Griego said that, after Mr. Chen had argued in support of his request, Ms. Beck would have the opportunity to respond. He then said "Get it. Okay, yes?" (R.T. 4:27-28.)

After both plaintiff and defendant had summarized their claims, Judge Griego identified a clause in the lease, clause 48, that asked whether the parties agreed to mediation or arbitration of disputes. He asked the parties, multiple times, whether they understood clause 48 to require mediation or arbitration. Both parties responded, multiple times, that the provision requiring mediation or arbitration had not been selected. The judge asked the question again.

The Court: Well[,] what was your understanding of 48 when you wrote it in there?

Ms. Beck: But he just said no.

The Court: Let me -- geez. Why do you interrupt when I -- come on, Ms. Beck, let him speak, please?

Ms. Beck: I just really want you to hear the case. Okay.

The Court: Geez.

Ms. Beck: I waited a long time to see you.

The Court: I'm taking a break. Talk to her, deputy.

(R.T. 27:16-25.) The judge then left the courtroom. The case went off the record. Although the plaintiff had spoken out of turn, she had not spoken disparagingly or disrespectfully towards the court, and she stated that she was motivated by her desire to have her case heard, after multiple continuances. The commission found that Judge Griego's instruction to the deputy to "talk to her" was demeaning, impatient, and undignified (canon 3B(4)).

When the case went back on the record, Judge Griego said:

Before the court took a break, the court was discussing with the defendant as to what his understanding of paragraph 48 of the lease meant. [¶] I need to remind the parties again, when someone is speaking, to help me stay focused, let that person speak. Don't interrupt because it throws me off. I lose focus. I want to help your case by being focused. [¶]

You don't have the right to do whatever you want in my courtroom. You have to follow the rules, and the main rule is allow the other person to speak when it's their turn to speak. Not just because it's a rule, because it's common courtesy, and I'm sure you're going to appreciate it when you're speaking, and the other person keeps quiet to allow you to have that same courtesy. So please don't interrupt. [¶] Whoever interrupts and does not follow that rule, I'm going to continue the case for a certain period of time so you'll understand that rule. Do both parties acknowledge and understand what I just said?

(R.T. 28:7-25.)

In his response to the commission's PI letter, Judge Griego denied that his conduct during the *Beck* hearing was improper. In his objections to the Notice, Judge Griego argued that he was following the advice set forth in "the Benchguide" to admonish parties not to interrupt. (See, California Judges Benchguides, Benchguide 34, Small Claims Court, § 34.2.)

Threatening to continue a case until the parties understood the "rule" not to interrupt, however, is not what the Benchguide advises, and is improper. The commission found that the judge's conduct, as described above, including interrupting the parties, leaving the courtroom during the hearing, and telling the deputy to "talk to her," violated his duties under canons 3B(4), 1, 2A, and 2.

During the hearing, Mr. Chen referenced legal fees incurred when the City of Los Angeles filed a criminal complaint against the parties for alleged building code violations. Although they disputed the nature of the charges, both parties testified that the criminal complaint had been dismissed. At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge Griego said:

Actually, I just want to state on the record, in case anyone wants to know. The parties were before the city attorney in a city attorney hearing, and they pretty much said the same thing then. So[,] this is kind of an appeal, which means they had an opportunity -- or, should I say, two bites of the apple.

[¶] So, no. They've had a lot of time to present their case and to be heard. So[,] this hearing is over. You'll get my decision in about a week.

(R.T. 35:27-36:7.) The judge's written decision denied both parties' claims.

In his response and his objections, Judge Griego argued that his statement about the criminal proceedings involving the parties was not the basis for his ruling. He stated that he determined the outcome of the parties' complaints based on the evidence submitted and testimony during the small claims hearing.

The commission determined Judge Griego made a misleading and inaccurate characterization of legal concepts when he described a small claims case as "kind of an appeal" of a criminal matter, and when he said that the parties had "two bites of the apple" because they had been named as defendants in a criminal complaint. Even if the judge ultimately issued a decision based on the facts and evidence before him, he did not otherwise explain his reasoning, either verbally in court or in a written order. The parties may therefore have reasonably inferred that the judge's decision to deny both claims was based on his belief, which he "just want[ed] to state on the record," that the parties had "two bites of the apple." By making a misleading statement that implied he was basing his decision on an incorrect legal standard, Judge Griego's conduct violated his duties to be faithful to and maintain professional competence in the law (canon 3B(2)).

Doyle v. LACCD

On June 28, 2024, Judge Griego presided over *Winnie Doyle v. Los Angeles Community College District, et al.* (No. 24STSC02067). Ms. Doyle claimed the defendants unlawfully discriminated against her based on her disability, by allegedly failing to offer her a reasonable accommodation after inviting her to interview for a job at Pierce Community College.

Ms. Doyle appeared virtually via CourtConnect, and a representative for the college, Monica Kirenga, appeared in person. Members of the public and other

litigants were present on CourtConnect and in the courtroom audience, including a group of students (unrelated to the defendant or the Los Angeles Community College District), who had come to observe. After the parties stated their appearances, Judge Griego said, “Okay, is this a dispute between co-tenants? Yes, no, maybe so?” Ms. Kirenga said no. The judge continued, “is it a landlord-tenant dispute? Somebody speak up and help me here.” (Audio at 13:26-13:38.) Ms. Kirenga then explained the nature of the claim.

The judge asked Ms. Doyle to summarize her claim, and she spoke for several minutes. Ms. Doyle stated that, prior to filing her complaint in small claims court, she had filed a complaint with the California Civil Rights Department, which forwarded her complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC gave her a “right to sue” notice in January 2024. After Ms. Doyle finished her statement, the judge asked whether she had filed a lawsuit pursuant to the EEOC’s right to sue letter. The following exchange occurred:

Court: And did you sue?

Ms. Doyle: Ah, yes, I filed this claim, Your Honor.

Court: No, not this claim. Did you sue in federal court? Pursuant to the EEOC letter?

Ms. Doyle: Your Honor, the EEOC said in their letter that I could sue either in state court or federal court. So, upon seeking guidance from the Disability Rights California organization, I went to L.A. County Small Claims advisor, so they said that small claims is a state court, so I can use this notice to sue in small-- in, in the state court, which is small claims. So, I decided to sue in small claims.

Court: Okay, answer my question, ma’am, please. Don’t answer -- don’t say anything else except answer my question. Don’t give me your answer.

Ms. Doyle: All right, Your Honor.

Court: Give me the answer to my questions. My questions are yes or no answers. They're not tricky. Not at all. I'm trying to help you, and have this case narrowed. I don't need extra words. Extra words take away--

Ms. Doyle: Thank you, Your Honor.

Court: -- a case to be heard by other people out there. So, limit your words.

Ms. Doyle: I understand.

(Audio at 18:47-19:45.) The judge proceeded to address the amount of damages the plaintiff was seeking. He said:

Court: And -- you know there's a limit of 12-five -- 12,500 in this -- what are your damages?

Ms. Doyle: Yes, Your Honor.

Court: If, if it wasn't -- just give me a number. What are your damages, if it wasn't [\$12,500]? Give me just a number, not an explanation.

Ms. Doyle: Yes, Your Honor. The number would be at least 74,000 dollars. But --

Court: No, I asked for a number, ma'am. I asked for a number, and okay, this is the second time I'm warning you. I know you can speak, and I know you can hear. Just answer the question, ma'am. Understand?

Ms. Doyle: 74,000.

Court: Well that's all you had to say. You don't gotta give me -- and everyone else out there, listen to me, okay, I'm trying to get everyone out of here. Okay -- you gotta, like, listen to the question, and answer the question.

Ms. Doyle: Sorry, Your Honor.

Court: Yeah, come on, it's not a -- it's not hard stuff. Okay. The reason I'm asking you this, is -- you know there's small claims court, there's limited, you know, court. And there's unlimited. The amount in each of those court [sic] is different, right. Small claims is [\$12,500]. Limited is 25,000, plus attorney's fees. You can't get attorney's fees here. And then unlimited is what it says, unlimited. And if you sue in small claims court, and if you win, and if your damages are 75,000 or more—or, or, above 12,500, you're gonna waive that. Forever. [Ms. Doyle speaking] You're not gonna get that. So, what you're doing, is you're telling me, that you have more damages than what I have money in my pocket. I only have twelve-five. And you're okay with that, right?

Ms. Doyle: I'm okay with that, Your Honor.

(Audio at 20:06-22:10.) The hearing continued. Judge Griego heard from the defendant's representative, Ms. Kirenga, and then invited Ms. Doyle to respond. After Ms. Doyle responded, Ms. Kirenga said, "Your Honor, may I say one --." The judge interrupted her and stated, "No. You already spoke. Geez, I looked at your evidence, no. This is small claims court, ma'am. You don't go on and on and on. I gave you an opportunity to speak." (Audio at 28:14-28:25.)

During the *Doyle* hearing, both parties were courteous and spoke in respectful tones of voice. The commission found that, when Judge Griego made statements such as "I know you can speak, and I know you can hear," and "yeah, come on, ... it's not hard stuff," he was disparaging and impolite. Judge Griego's comments admonishing Ms. Doyle to listen to his questions, to "limit [her] words," and asking if she understood, were gratuitous and impolite towards a self-represented litigant, whose answers were, generally, responsive to his questions. By interrupting Ms. Doyle and Ms. Kirenga, and by addressing the audience and saying, "everyone else out there, listen to me, okay, I'm trying to get everyone out of here," the judge's actions were impatient, demeaning, and undignified.

In his response to the commission's PI letter, Judge Griego denied that his conduct in the *Doyle* hearing was improper.

The commission found that Judge Griego's conduct in the *Doyle* hearing violated his duties under canons 3B(4), 1, 2A, and 2.

Pile v. Lithia Motors Inc.

On June 28, 2024, Judge Griego presided over *William Pile v. Lithia Motors, Inc.* (No. 24STSC02310). Upon calling the case, Judge Griego told the plaintiff that, since the defendant had not appeared, "If you take more than 30 seconds [to summarize your claim], you're probably taking too long." (Audio at 1:41-1:44.) Later in the hearing, the judge asked the plaintiff, "Okay, you sued them in May. Did they reach out to you after that and try to work it out?" The plaintiff did not respond immediately. The judge then said, "I'll ask the question again. You sued [them] in May of 2024. After that date, did they ever reach out to you?" The plaintiff responded, "No, sir." The judge said, "Okay that's a real simple question. Real simple. And a real simple answer." (Audio at 3:45-4:03.)

In his response to the commission, Judge Griego denied that his conduct in the *Pile* hearing was improper.

The commission found that, by making these remarks, Judge Griego's conduct violated his duties under canons 3B(4), 1, 2A, and 2.

II. Misconduct Relating to Administrative Duties

The commission sent Judge Griego a PI letter alleging the above-described misconduct on May 14, 2025. The PI letter stated that, in accordance with the Rules of the Commission on Judicial Performance, rules 104(b) and 111(a), Judge Griego's response to the allegations was due to the commission on June 3, 2025. The May 14 letter was sent via certified mail, addressed to Judge Griego at the Los Angeles County Superior Court, 210 West Temple Street in Los Angeles. According to the certified mail return receipt, the letter was received at the court on May 19.

On June 4, 2025, the commission sent, via certified mail to the Los Angeles County Superior Court, a letter informing Judge Griego that the commission had not received a response from him to the May 14 PI letter. The June 4 letter included a copy of the May 14 letter and attachments. According to the certified mail return receipt, the June 4 letter was received at the court on June 11.

On June 20, 2025, the commission sent, via certified mail, a letter addressed to Presiding Judge Sergio Tapia. The letter accompanied a sealed envelope containing the June 4 letter and the May 14 PI letter, and asked Judge Tapia to ensure delivery of the enclosed sealed envelope to Judge Griego. The sealed envelope addressed to Judge Griego was sent to his home in Los Angeles, via FedEx, and FedEx tracking information indicated it was delivered on July 7, 2025.

On August 27, 2025, commission staff contacted Judge Griego by email. Judge Griego responded to the commission's efforts to contact him, for the first time, on August 28, 2025. In a communication to the commission on September 3, 2025, he offered an explanation for not responding to the commission's efforts to contact him in May and June.

During the relevant time period, Judge Griego was assigned to the Magistrate Unit of the criminal court. He conducts his work remotely, and his duties do not require him to be physically present in any courthouse. Judge Griego was aware that, periodically, the court would forward mail addressed to him, to a personal mailing address. Judge Griego has not resided at the address to which the commission's June 20 correspondence was delivered, via FedEx, for over one year. At some time, Judge Griego provided the court with the number of a P.O. Box. He checked that P.O. Box infrequently, and did not check the P.O. Box between approximately May 14, 2025, and July 2025. In or around July 2025, Judge Griego was informed by an official at the P.O. Box office that mail addressed to the judge had been returned to sender. Judge Griego did not

contact the court in an effort to identify or obtain mail that may have been sent by the court to his P.O. Box.

In his objections to the Notice, Judge Griego argued that there is no rule that a judicial officer must keep the commission aware of their residential mailing address, and he therefore was not on notice that not frequently collecting his residential mail could be a violation of the canons. Judge Griego, however, had a duty under canon 3C(2) to maintain professional competence in judicial administration, and a duty under canon 3D(4) to cooperate with judicial disciplinary agencies. The commission determined that, while assigned to work remotely, Judge Griego's failure to check the P.O. Box to which the court was forwarding his mail, over a period of approximately two months, amounted to a violation of his duties under canon 3C(2) to maintain professional competence in judicial administration and under canon 3D(4) to cooperate with judicial disciplinary agencies. Since Judge Griego's failure to monitor his postal mail resulted in his failure to timely receive and respond to the commission's May 14 PI letter, his conduct also amounted to a violation of his obligations under canons 3A (judges must ensure that all judicial duties prescribed by law take precedence over all other activities) and 4A(3) (judges must conduct all extrajudicial activities in a manner that does not interfere with the proper performance of judicial duties).

DISCIPLINE

At his appearance before the commission, Judge Griego argued extensively that his underlying serious health issues, including medications he was prescribed, contributed to his poor demeanor towards the litigants in his small claims court. As the commission has stated previously, however, if a medical condition contributes to a judge engaging in misconduct, "they are obligated to take time away from their duties until such time as they can once again perform their duties ethically." (*Public Admonishment of Judge Julian W. Bailey*, at p. 20.) Further, judges are "public figure[s] and a symbol of justice of whom much is expected." (Rothman, Cal. Judicial Conduct Handbook (4th ed. 2017) § 8:18, p. 512.) As such, a judge must

“not only be aware of [their] own vulnerabilities or personality[,] ... but ... aware of the *stresses* that can contribute to the intrusion of emotion” (emphasis in original). (Rothman, *supra*, § 2:46, p. 120.) Judge Griego thus had an obligation to be even more mindful of his on-bench demeanor, or to seek a reasonable accommodation, until his symptoms resolved.

The commission determined that Judge Griego’s conduct, in interrupting litigants when they attempted to answer his questions; making disparaging, gratuitous remarks, like repeatedly telling a self-represented litigant that a case that was not before him was “worthless” and “mean[t] nothing”; abruptly leaving the courtroom in the middle of proceedings; and instructing a courtroom employee to “talk to the woman” or “talk to her,” referring to a litigant, undermined the integrity of the judicial office. (See, Policy Declarations of Com. on Jud. Performance, policy 7.1(1)(h).) “A litigant whose case is decided by a rude, angry, and impatient judge will come away with a sense that the judge did not actually ‘hear’ the case, let alone handle the case with fairness and impartiality.” (Rothman, *supra*, § 2:46, p. 117.)

Judge Griego’s misconduct was also aggravated by the fact that he engaged in multiple acts of misconduct, during multiple hearings, and by the impact on the unrepresented litigants who appeared before him. (See, Policy Declarations of Com. on Jud. Performance, policies 7.1(1)(a) and 7.1(1)(f).) Further, the commission considered Judge Griego’s failure to fully appreciate the impropriety of his conduct as an additional aggravating factor. (See, Policy Declarations of Com. on Jud. Performance, policy 7.1.(2)(a).)


The commission also considered Judge Griego’s recent prior discipline to be a significant aggravating factor. On July 11, 2024, the commission publicly admonished Judge Griego for a pattern of pervasive poor demeanor, including making discourteous, disparaging, and gratuitous remarks to small claims litigants. During each of the hearings discussed above, Judge Griego was aware he was facing public discipline by the commission for pervasive poor demeanor directed to pro per small claims parties. The public admonishment was issued four days

before the *Beck* hearing. Additionally, in 2017, Judge Griego received an advisory letter for independently investigating a traffic accident scene, failing to disclose his receipt of ex parte information, and failing to disqualify himself.

The commission determined the judge's conduct was, at a minimum, improper action.

Commission members Hon. Lisa B. Lench; Mani Sheik, Esq.; Ms. Leisa Biggers; Rickey Ivie, Esq.; Ms. Kay Cooperman Jue; Hon. Julia C. Kelety; Mr. Richard A. Long; Hon. Kimberly Merrifield; and Mr. Gerald C. Shelton voted to impose the public admonishment. Commission member Ms. Beatriz E. Tapia was recused. Commission member Mr. Alton L. Garrett, Jr. did not participate.

Date: May 13, 2026



Hon. Lisa B. Lench
Chairperson