Order

Michigan Supreme Court
Lansing, Michigan

October 9, 2026

SC: 169031
JTC Formal Complaint No. 110

In re THOMAS D. WILSON, JUDGE
4th CIRCUIT COURT

Megan K. Cavanagh,
Chief Justice

Brian K. Zahra
Richard H. Bernstein
Elizabeth M. Welch
Kyra H. Bolden
Kimberly A. Thomas
Noah P. Hood,
Justices

The Judicial Tenure Commission has issued a Decision and Recommendation, to which respondent, Hon. Thomas D. Wilson, Judge of the 4th Circuit Court, consents. It is accompanied by a settlement agreement, in which respondent waived his rights and consented to a sanction of retiring from the bench effective February 28, 2026, refraining from seeking election or accepting appointment to judicial office, and after retirement refraining from seeking or accepting any appointment as a visiting judge until after September 1, 2026.

In resolving this matter, we are mindful of the standards set forth in *In re Brown*, 461 Mich 1291, 1292-1293 (2000):

> Everything else being equal:
>
> (1) misconduct that is part of a pattern or practice is more serious than an isolated instance of misconduct;
>
> (2) misconduct on the bench is usually more serious than the same misconduct off the bench;
>
> (3) misconduct that is prejudicial to the actual administration of justice is more serious than misconduct that is prejudicial only to the appearance of propriety;
>
> (4) misconduct that does not implicate the actual administration of justice, or its appearance of impropriety, is less serious than misconduct that does;
>
> (5) misconduct that occurs spontaneously is less serious than misconduct that is premeditated or deliberated;
>
> (6) misconduct that undermines the ability of the justice system to discover the truth of what occurred in a legal controversy, or to reach the most just result in such a case, is more serious than misconduct that merely delays such discovery;
>
> (7) misconduct that involves the unequal application of justice on the basis of such considerations as race, color, ethnic background, gender, or religion are more serious than breaches of justice that do not disparage the integrity of the system on the basis of a class of citizenship.

In this case, those standards are being applied in the context of the Judicial Tenure

Commission's stipulated findings of fact, which, following our review de novo, we adopt as our own:

1. Abuse of Alcohol; Public Intoxication.

A. Respondent abused alcohol from sometime between 2013 and 2015 until 2020 or 2021.

B. During that period, respondent at times appeared in public (including at the courthouse) after consuming alcohol, so that others observed him smelling of alcohol, looking disheveled, or appearing flushed.

C. Respondent acknowledges that after consuming alcoholic beverages elsewhere, he may have gone to the courthouse.

D. Between 2016 and 2019, seven individuals interacted with respondent in the courthouse, in public settings, or through communications regarding court business, and observed respondent smelling of alcohol, looking disheveled, or speaking with a slurred voice.

2. Failure to Obtain a Substance Abuse Assessment.

A. The Commission asked respondent to obtain a substance abuse assessment by the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program (LJAP) in May 2019, pursuant to MCR 9.221(E) (formerly MCR 9.208(B)).

B. Respondent did not obtain that assessment.

C. Disciplinary counsel asked respondent to obtain another LJAP assessment in 2024. He did so. The May 2024 assessment concluded that there was "no present cause for concern" that respondent was abusing alcohol, based on the absence of "difficulties" and his candid demeanor during the LJAP interview. LJAP reported that respondent appeared to have resolved his drinking problem that was present several years earlier.

3. Sexual Harassment.

A. Between 2016 and 2018, respondent made remarks to several females whom he worked with that were received by those women as being offensive. The remarks included descriptions of sexual encounters and commenting on the physical appearance of the females.

4. Failure to Disclose Conflicts of Interest.

A. Respondent had business relationships with certain local attorneys that he should have disclosed when the attorneys appeared before him between 2007 and 2022.

B. The undisclosed relationships included three attorneys who were tenants in a building respondent owned, an attorney with whom he was an investment partner, and five attorneys who represented respondent or his family members in legal proceedings.

C. The landlord-tenant and investment dealings were financial relationships that could have been grounds for respondent's disqualification under MCR 2.003 in cases in which the attorneys appeared before him.

D. There is no evidence that any of the relationships impacted respondent's decisions in any cases.

E. Respondent did not disclose any of the conflicts described above in any proceeding between 2007 and 2022.

5. Interference in Case Proceedings.

A. Respondent improperly injected himself in various cases.

B. In *People v Phillip Dawson*, 4th Circuit Court Case No. 18-4672-FH, a domestic violence case that was pending before respondent, the defendant was the subject of a no-contact order with the victim and was on a tether monitoring his location.

(*i*). On March 24, 2019, respondent, upon learning that the defendant was to be arrested for the violation of a no-contact order, called police dispatch without the knowledge of counsel and identified himself as "Judge Wilson."

(*ii*). During the call, respondent stated he had instructed the defendant to go to the victim's house to pick up some medicine, that the defendant did not understand how the monitoring process worked, that there was no need to arrest the defendant, and that respondent had the situation "all taken care of."

(*iii*). Respondent's instructions to the defendant to pick up the medicine violated a no-contact order imposed by another judge, which exceeded respondent's authority as a judge.

C. Respondent's personal divorce case, *Thomas Wilson v Julie Wilson*, 4th Circuit Court Case No. 13-1418-DM, was at issue from 2013 through 2015 in the 4th Circuit Court, during which respondent was chief judge of the 4th Circuit Court.

(*i*). While post-judgment proceedings were at issue in 2016, the case was to be transferred to another county based on Judge Diane Rappleye's disqualification.

(*ii*). A draft transfer order relating to the change of venue reflected that respondent owed a balance of $2,030 in child support.

(*iii*). Respondent approached Judge Rappleye ex parte to obtain her signature on an order, which reflected that the child support amount was crossed out by hand and a $0 balance was handwritten in its place on the order.

(*iv*). When Judge Rappleye advised respondent that she could not sign the order as she had disqualified herself from the case, respondent replied that he had "stopped" the disqualification from going through.

(*v*). After Judge Rappleye told respondent she could not sign the order on an ex parte basis, they called respondent's ex-wife, who gave her consent to Judge Rappleye to sign the order.

D. Respondent's relative was a defendant in a 2017 retail fraud case that originated in Washtenaw County.

(*i*). Then-juvenile court referee (now Circuit Judge) Allison Bates and Judge Susan Jordan rejected a proposed transfer of the Washtenaw County case to Jackson County, because respondent was the minor's father.

(*ii*). At the first hearing in Washtenaw County on August 22, 2017, respondent was present and advised the referee that he was the chief judge in Jackson County. The referee recessed the hearing, and the matter never went back on the record.

(*iii*). The Washtenaw County court transferred the case to Jackson County one day after the hearing.

(*iv*). Soon after that hearing, respondent separately approached both Referee Bates and Judge Jordan and personally discussed the transfer of the case back to Jackson County, bringing the

transfer order to Judge Jordan to sign to reflect the court's acceptance of the case.

(*v*). Based in part on respondent's personal requests, the case was accepted for transfer to Jackson County.

E. Respondent's relative was a defendant in a 2017 minor-in-possession case pending in the 12th District Court.

(*i*). Respondent met separately with Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Katie Rezmierski and Prosecuting Attorney Jerard Jarzynka, asking that the Prosecuting Attorney dismiss the case.

(*ii*). Both Rezmierski and Jarzynka told respondent that the case was transferred to another county's prosecutor based on the conflict caused by respondent's relative being prosecuted by the prosecuting attorney of the county in which respondent was chief judge.

(*iii*). After each attorney told respondent that they would not dismiss the case, respondent made remarks such as: "What goes around comes around" and "I'll remember this."

(*iv*). Respondent's remarks threatened retaliation for the prosecutor's refusal to comply with respondent's improper request.

F. In relation to the same minor-in-possession case, respondent approached a visiting assistant prosecuting attorney who was assigned to his family member's case and respondent referenced his knowledge of several individuals from the county where the assistant prosecuting attorney worked. To the assistant prosecuting attorney, this was an attempt to influence her and to take into account that respondent was the defendant's relative.

6. Delay in Decisions.

A. Respondent presided over *Lauth v Lauth*, 4th Circuit Court Case No. 18-2332-DO, a case that involved elderly litigants for whom there was concern that one or both could fall ill before there was a resolution.

(*i*). Respondent conducted a one-day bench trial in 2019 and after the parties filed written closing arguments, the case was submitted to respondent for a decision on August 26, 2019.

(*ii*). Over the ensuing months, counsel for the parties made several inquiries to respondent's staff about the status of the decision, but those inquiries did not prompt a timelier resolution of the case.

(*iii*). Respondent did not issue his decision on the case until August 31, 2020.

(*iv*). Respondent does not have an explanation for what caused the delay.

B. Respondent presided over *Gardner v Jackson Community College*, 4th Circuit Court Case No. 19-4785-CD.

(*i*). Defendant Jackson County Community College filed a motion for summary disposition on April 1, 2021, and after holding a hearing, respondent took the motion under advisement on May 21.

(*ii*). The motion remained pending until March 29, 2022, including four months while respondent was on medical leave.

(*iii*). Respondent does not have an explanation for the delay in deciding the motion.

C. Respondent was assigned to *People v Melanie Cinpak*, 4th Circuit Court Case No. 17-5452-FH.

(*i*). In June 2018 a jury convicted Cinpak, a registered nurse, of resisting arrest and obstructing a police officer.

(*ii*). Over the assistant prosecuting attorney's objection that a delayed sentence could not be imposed due to Cinpak's prior misdemeanor convictions, respondent issued a delayed sentence anyway under MCL 771.1 and eventually dismissed the case.

(*iii*). Because there was a technical defect in the existing dismissal order, defense counsel filed a motion to dismiss in February 2019. Although the assistant prosecuting attorney continued the objection that MCL 771.1 could not be utilized in the case, respondent granted the motion to dismiss in March 2019.

(*iv*). The Court of Appeals vacated the dismissal order and remanded the case to the 4th Circuit Court for respondent to

reinstate the conviction in April 2020 because there was no basis in law for respondent to dismiss the case.

(*v*). Respondent failed to take any action based on the Court of Appeals remand order for 23 months.

D. MCR 3.705(A)(1) requires judges to act on ex parte personal protection order ("PPO") petitions within one business day after filing. MCR 3.705(B)(1) requires that PPOs that do not seek ex parte relief be heard "as soon as possible" unless the court determines that the petition is so lacking in merit that it should be dismissed without a hearing.

E. Respondent does not dispute that he did not timely decide petitions for PPOs that were assigned to him on three separate occasions in 2018, 2021, and 2023, which concerned over 50 PPO proceedings.

7. Obstructing the Reporting of Delay to the State Court Administrative Office

A. MCR 8.107(B) requires trial judges to give the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) quarterly statements "provid[ing] information on all [civil] matters pending during the reporting period that were not decided within 56 days from submission."

B. Respondent failed to report the following delays as required by MCR 8.107(B):

(*i*). *Lauth v Lauth*, referenced above, a decision after trial that remained pending for one year and should have been included in MCR 8.107 reports to SCAO for the first three quarters of 2020.

(*ii*). *Gardner v Jackson Community College*, referenced above, a decision on a summary disposition motion pending for almost one year and should have been included in his delay reports filed in the fourth quarter of 2021 and first quarter of 2022.

(*iii*). *Clem-Adams v Adams*, 4th Circuit Court Case No. 2018-3113-DO, a decision on an evidentiary hearing pending from May 6 to November 27, 2024, and should have been included in his delay reports filed in the second and third quarters of 2024.

(*iv*). *Bradshaw v Bradshaw*, 4th Circuit Court Case No. 2022-2699-DO, a decision on a post-judgment divorce issue that was

pending from May 22 to November 12, 2024, that should have been included in his delay report for the third quarter of 2024.

C. There is a procedure in state circuit courts requiring cases taken under advisement to be coded so they can be tracked by the court computer system while a decision is pending.

D. Respondent instructed his staff not to code any cases as "under advisement" on the computer system starting around the time he took the bench in January 2007 until April 2025.

E. Respondent's purpose in instructing his staff not to code pending matters in the way required by circuit court protocol was to conceal his delayed matters, including from SCAO.

The standards set forth in *Brown* are also being applied to the Judicial Tenure Commission's legal conclusions to which respondent stipulated and which we adopt as our own. The Commission concludes, and we agree, that:

1. Respondent's conduct involving abuse of alcohol and public intoxication violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canons 2(A) and (B) because it created an appearance of impropriety and failed to promote public confidence in the judiciary. This conduct also violated MCR 9.202(B) as habitual intemperance.

2. Respondent's failure to obtain a substance abuse assessment violated MCR 9.221(E) (formerly MCR 9.208(B)), which required him to comply with a reasonable request by the commission. That failure also violated MCR 9.202(B)(1)(f) (formerly MCR 9.205(B)(1)(f)), which imposed a similar requirement.

3. Although respondent asserts that he did not intend to offend, his sexually charged remarks violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canons 2(A) and (B) because they created an appearance of impropriety, were disrespectful, and reflected discourteous treatment of women based on their gender.

4. Respondent violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(C) each time he failed to disclose conflicts of interest and potential grounds for disqualification under MCR 2.003 between 2007 and 2022.

5. Respondent's call to police dispatch regarding the *Dawson* matter was a prohibited ex parte communication that violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(4). His interference in the case called his

impartiality into question contrary to Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(B), and his use of the prestige of his office to prevent the defendant's arrest violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(C).

6. Respondent's contact with Judge Rappleye regarding his own personal divorce case violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(4) because it amounted to a prohibited ex parte communication. It also violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(C) as a use of the prestige of his office to advance personal interests, and Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(A) as an impropriety and an appearance of impropriety.

7. Respondent's conduct in his personal divorce action in preventing the disqualification order as to Judge Rappleye from being processed violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(C), as he used his prestige of office to impact the disqualification process, and Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(B)(1), in that he obstructed the diligent discharge of administrative responsibilities of other judges and court officials.

8. Respondent's involvement in the transfer of his relative's retail-fraud case from Washtenaw County to Jackson County violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canons 2(A) and 2(C), as it created an appearance of impropriety and was a use of the prestige of his office to further his family's personal interests. Respondent's actions in that case also violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(B)(1), in that he interfered with the administrative processing of his relative's case.

9. Respondent's conduct with respect to his relative's minor-in-possession case created an appearance of impropriety that violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(A). His conversation with the assistant prosecuting attorney violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(B) because respondent acted in a manner that undermined public faith in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. Respondent also violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(C), by using the prestige of his office to benefit his relative, as well as by allowing his judicial conduct to be influenced by his relationship with his relative.

10. Respondent's delay in rendering decisions in *Lauth v Lauth* and *Gardner v Jackson Community College* amounted to a failure to promptly dispose of the business of the court that violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(6) (formerly Canon 3(A)(5)).

11. Respondent failed to be faithful to the law in violation of Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(1) when he sentenced the defendant in *People v Cinpak* to a delayed sentence under MCL 771.1 despite his awareness that this statute could not be invoked.

12. Respondent's failure to take any action in *People v Cinpak* for 23 months after the remand from the Court of Appeals violated the remand order issued by the Court of Appeals and amounted to another failure to be faithful to the law in violation of Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(1). It also violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(6) (formerly Canon 3(A)(5)) as a failure to promptly dispose of the business of the court.

13. Respondent's failure to address the three PPO matters in a timely fashion violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3, which states that judicial duties should take precedence over all other activities. It also violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(6) (formerly Canon 3(A)(5)) as a failure to promptly dispose of the business of the court. It also violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(A)(1) in that respondent was not faithful to the law because respondent did not address the petitions for PPOs in the time period he knew was required by the court rules.

14. Respondent's conduct in obstructing the reporting of delay to SCAO violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(B)(1) in that he failed to diligently discharge his administrative responsibilities.

15. Respondent's instruction to his staff not to use the proper coding for the computer system violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3(B)(2), which required him to direct staff to observe high standards of diligence. Additionally, his effort to conceal his delayed matters from being tracked was an ongoing act of deception that violated Code of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2(A), in that it was an impropriety and created an appearance of impropriety. It also violated MCR 9.104(3) in that it was dishonest.

After review of the Judicial Tenure Commission's decision and recommendation, the consent agreement, the standards set forth in *Brown*, and the above findings and conclusions, we ORDER that the Hon. Thomas D. Wilson retire from the bench effective February 28, 2026, refrain from seeking election or accepting appointment to judicial office, and after retirement refrain from seeking or accepting any appointments as a visiting

judge until after September 1, 2026.

CAVANAGH, C.J. (*concurring*).

I concur with this Court's order. Our court rules permit the disciplinary counsel for the Judicial Tenure Commission (JTC) and a respondent judge to enter into a consent agreement that may include an agreement as to the appropriate sanction. MCR 9.245(A). The JTC has the power to accept or reject the consent agreement and to issue a decision and recommendation to this Court consistent with that agreement. MCR 9.245(B). This Court reviews the JTC's recommendation de novo. *In re Simpson*, 500 Mich 533, 545 (2017). If the Court agrees with the JTC's recommendation and finds the sanction appropriate, it may adopt the recommendation. *Id*. If the Court disagrees with the JTC's decision based on a consent agreement and decides to impose a different sanction, the respondent must be afforded the opportunity to withdraw the consent agreement, and the matter is remanded for further proceedings. MCR 9.252(B).

I agree with the Court's decision to adopt the JTC's stipulated findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommended sanction. I write separately only to address the provision of the consent agreement in which respondent agreed to refrain from seeking or accepting any appointment as a visiting judge until after September 1, 2026. The authority to appoint a retired judge to act as a visiting judge is a power that rests solely with this Court. MCL 600.226(1). I emphasize that, while the consent agreement prohibits respondent from seeking a visiting judgeship for a finite period, neither the JTC nor respondent can compel or direct the exercise of this Court's authority under MCL 600.226(1).[1] With that made clear, I join the Court's order.

[1] I express no opinion on a future appointment for respondent under MCL 600.226. However, I note that the instances and level of misconduct that warrant the serious sanction imposed in this case would be relevant, and likely dispositive, as to whether such an appointment would be appropriate.

I, Elizabeth Kingston-Miller, Clerk of the Michigan Supreme Court, certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of the order entered at the direction of the Court.

October 9, 2026

Clerk