

In the Supreme Court of Indiana

IN THE MATTER OF)	
)	
THE HONORABLE)	
)	Case No. 19S-JD-567
SABRINA R. BELL)	
)	
CRAWFORD CIRCUIT COURT)	

**NOTICE OF THE INSTITUTION OF FORMAL PROCEEDINGS AND
STATEMENT OF CHARGES**

The Indiana Commission on Judicial Qualifications (“Commission”), having found probable cause to warrant formal charges of judicial misconduct, now notifies Respondent, the Honorable Sabrina Bell (“Judge Bell”) of the filing of these Charges. These Charges are brought under Admission and Discipline Rule 25 and before the Indiana Supreme Court, which, pursuant to Article 7, § 4 of the Constitution of Indiana, has original jurisdiction over the discipline, suspension, and removal of all judges and judicial officers of this State. The Commission charges that Judge Bell, while judge of the Crawford Circuit Court, engaged in judicial misconduct as specifically charged below. Pursuant to Admission and Discipline Rule 25 VIII (F), Judge Bell may file a written Answer to these Charges within twenty (20) days of service.

BACKGROUND

1. Judge Bell was admitted to the Indiana Bar in 2011.
2. Since January 1, 2017, Judge Bell has served as the Judge of Crawford Circuit Court.

3. At all times pertinent to these Charges, Judge Bell presided over a general jurisdiction docket which included criminal and civil cases.

FACTS GIVING RISE TO MISCONDUCT CHARGES

1. From May 1-3, 2019, the Spring Judicial College for the Indiana judiciary was being held in Indianapolis. Judge Bell was scheduled to attend the conference and drove from Crawford County to Clark County to drive to Indianapolis with Clark Circuit Court Magistrate William Dawkins (“Magistrate Dawkins”) the evening of April 30, 2019. Judge Bell and Magistrate Dawkins checked into their individual hotel rooms between 6:00 – 6:30 p.m.
2. At approximately 7:00 p.m., Judge Bell met Magistrate Dawkins and some other judges in the hotel lobby area and consumed two alcoholic beverages (Seagram’s Escapes).
3. Judge Bell, Magistrate Dawkins, and several other judges went to a nearby restaurant and Judge Bell had wine with dinner.
4. Around 10:00 p.m., Clark Circuit Court Judge Andrew Adams (“Judge Adams”) joined the group. After dinner was finished, some judges went back to the hotel, and the rest of the group went to the Claddagh Irish Pub. Judge Bell drank several cocktails while there.
5. Prior to 11:00 p.m., several judicial officers went back to the hotel, leaving Judge Adams, Judge Bell, and Magistrate Dawkins at the Claddagh Irish Pub. Around midnight, Judge Bell, Judge Adams, and Magistrate Dawkins went to Brothers Bar & Grill. Judge Jacobs met the group at Brothers Bar & Grill after 12:30 a.m., and the group continued to drink alcoholic beverages, socialized, and played darts and cornhole until approximately 3:00 a.m.

6. Around 3:00 a.m., Judge Bell, Judge Adams, Judge Jacobs, and Magistrate Dawkins walked to The Red Garter Gentlemen's Club and attempted to go in, but the club was already closed.
7. At approximately 3:15 a.m., Judge Bell, Judge Jacobs, and Magistrate Dawkins walked over to the nearby White Castle at 55 W. South St.
 - a. Magistrate Dawkins went inside the restaurant, and the other three stood outside along the west side of the restaurant.
 - b. At the time, Judge Bell was intoxicated.
 - c. Outside the restaurant, Judge Bell, Judge Adams, and Judge Jacobs behaved in an injudicious manner.
8. At approximately 3:17 a.m., a blue SUV, driven by Alfredo Vazquez ("Vazquez") in which Brandon Kaiser ("Kaiser") was a passenger, went past Judge Bell, Judge Adams, and Judge Jacobs.
9. Either Vazquez or Kaiser yelled something out the window which drew the attention of the judges, and Judge Bell extended her middle finger to the occupants of the SUV.
10. Vazquez parked the SUV in the White Castle parking lot, and he and Kaiser got out and moved to the west-side door of White Castle, less than ten feet away from Judge Bell, Judge Adams, and Judge Jacobs.
11. A heated verbal altercation occurred between the judges' group (Judge Adams, Judge Bell, and Judge Jacobs) and Vazquez and Kaiser, with all participants yelling (including using profanity) and making dismissive, mocking, or insolent gestures toward the other group.
12. At no time during the verbal altercation did Judge Bell attempt to move to another location in the parking lot or around the corner of the White Castle in order to avoid further

confrontation (or to de-escalate the conflict) with Kaiser and/or Vazquez but rather she continued to provoke communication with the two men.

13. After a verbal exchange between Judge Bell and Vazquez, Judge Adams and Judge Jacobs started moving towards Vazquez and Kaiser, and a physical confrontation ensued between the four men. At some point during the encounter, both Judge Adams and Judge Jacobs were shot by Kaiser, and then Kaiser and Vazquez left.

14. Police arrived on the scene at approximately 3:23 a.m., and medical personnel arrived less than five minutes later. Judge Adams was transported to Methodist Hospital, and Judge Jacobs was transported to Eskenazi Hospital.

15. Judge Bell and Magistrate Dawkins remained on the scene to speak to the police, and both judicial officers were taken to the police station to give recorded statements. Judge Bell gave another recorded statement to the police a couple of weeks later.

a. In her recorded statement(s) to the police, Judge Bell asserted that she does not remember what she said to Vazquez and/or Kaiser or what started the physical altercations.

b. However, while on the scene, the media videotaped Judge Bell telling police detectives, in an excited state, "I feel like this is all my fault" or words to that effect.

c. Additionally, after being informed during her recorded statement that police detectives had retrieved video of the incident, Judge Bell made the following remarks:

1) "I'm afraid that I said something to them first, I don't know."

2) "[W]e're all very good friends and they're very protective of me. And I don't know, and I'm afraid that I said something to those two strange men

at first, and then they said something back to me. And then I said something and then those two went to defend me.”

- 3) “I’m not denying that I said something or egged it on...because I drink...I mean I fully acknowledge that I drink and get mouthy, and I’m fiery and I’m feisty, but if I would have ever thought for a second that they were gonna fight or that that guy had a gun on him, I would never, never....”

CHARGES

The Commission incorporates the facts set out in ¶¶ 1 to 15 into the Charges below.

COUNT 1

The Commission charges that, on May 1, 2019, Judge Bell appeared in public in an intoxicated state just outside the White Castle at 55 W. South St., Indianapolis, and behaved in an injudicious manner that reflected poorly on the judiciary. By engaging in this conduct, Judge Bell violated Rule 1.2 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires a judge to act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity, independence, and impartiality of the judiciary and to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety, and Rule 3.1(C) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires a judge to not participate in extrajudicial activities that would appear to a reasonable person to undermine the judge’s integrity, independence, or impartiality.

COUNT 2

The Commission charges that, on May 1, 2019, Judge Bell was involved in a verbal altercation with Alfredo Vazquez and/or Brandon Kaiser and engaged in behavior during that

altercation which reflected poorly on the judiciary. By engaging in this conduct, Judge Bell violated Rule 1.2 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires a judge to act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity, independence, and impartiality of the judiciary and to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety, and Rule 3.1(C) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires a judge to not participate in extrajudicial activities that would appear to a reasonable person to undermine the judge's integrity, independence, or impartiality.

WHEREFORE, the Commission respectfully requests that, upon the filing of Judge Bell's Answer, the Indiana Supreme Court appoint three Masters to conduct a public hearing on the charges that Judge Bell committed judicial misconduct as alleged, and further prays that the Supreme Court find that Judge Bell committed misconduct and that it impose upon her the appropriate sanction.

10/11/19
DATE

Indiana Commission on
Judicial Qualifications
251 N. Illinois St., Ste. 1600
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(317) 232-4706

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that a copy of this "Notice of the Institution of Formal Proceedings and Statement of Charges" was sent by certified mail, postage pre-paid, and electronically to Judge Bell at Crawford Circuit Court, 715 Judicial Plaza Drive, P.O. Box 216, English, IN 47118.

10/11/19
DATE

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