



## **Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct 2024 Annual Report**

This is the annual report of the Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct (“Commission”) for calendar year 2024.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION**

Judicial conduct commissions exist in every state and serve a vital role in promoting public confidence in the independence, impartiality, integrity, and competence of the judicial branch of government.

The Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct was created in 1970, when voters approved Article 6.1 of the Arizona Constitution. Article 6.1 was amended in 1988, establishing the Commission as an independent state agency responsible for investigating complaints against judicial officers serving on the supreme court, court of appeals, superior courts, justice courts, and municipal courts.

The Commission does not have jurisdiction over federal judges, tribal judges, or administrative law judges. Judicial officers subject to the Commission’s jurisdiction must comply with the Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct (“Code”) adopted by the Arizona Supreme Court.

### **COMMISSION PROCEDURES**

The Commission’s rules, which are promulgated by the Arizona Supreme Court, prescribe the procedures for investigating and resolving complaints of judicial misconduct. The rules are available on the Commission’s website at [www.azcourts.gov/azcjc](http://www.azcourts.gov/azcjc).

Anyone who believes that a judge has violated the Code may submit a complaint to the Commission. The Commission may also open an investigation on its own initiative. Complaint forms are available on the Commission's website, by mail, and at the Commission's office.

Unless a member is unavailable due to a conflict of interest or other commitment, all eleven Commission members review every docketed complaint. If the Commission members conclude there is not clear and convincing evidence of a Code violation, the complaint is dismissed, and the complainant and judge(s) named in the complaint are notified in writing of that decision.

**Example:** A defendant in an injunction against harassment proceeding alleges that a justice of the peace was rude and condescending. Commission staff obtains the audio/video recording of the proceeding and prepares a written report that all Commission members review, along with the written complaint. The recording establishes that the justice of the peace was not rude, did not raise her voice, and gave both sides an opportunity to be heard. The Commission concludes the complaint has not been substantiated and votes to dismiss it.

If a complaint identifies issues that warrant further investigation, Commission staff will obtain relevant additional information, which may include a response from the judge, court records, recordings and transcripts, and witness interviews. The Commission's staff attorneys then prepare a report for members of the Commission. After reviewing the report, along with the complaint, any response received from the judge, available recordings, court documents and other relevant information, the Commission members determine the appropriate disposition. The Commission may dismiss a complaint, issue a public reprimand, impose terms such as counseling or educational programming, or direct that disciplinary counsel file formal charges.

**Example:** A litigant alleges that a superior court judge yelled during a hearing, was extremely impatient, and gave her a disproportionately short period of time to present her case in comparison to the time allotted the adverse party. Commission staff obtains the recording of the proceeding, requests a response from the judge, and prepares a written report. After reviewing the report, the complaint, the judge's response, and the recording, the Commission members conclude that the judge did not comply with Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct Rule 2.6 (ensuring the right to be heard) and Rule 2.8(B) (requiring judges to be patient, dignified, and courteous). After considering relevant aggravating and mitigating circumstances, the Commission members vote to publicly reprimand the judge. The reprimand is posted to the Commission's website, where the record in that matter is available for public review.

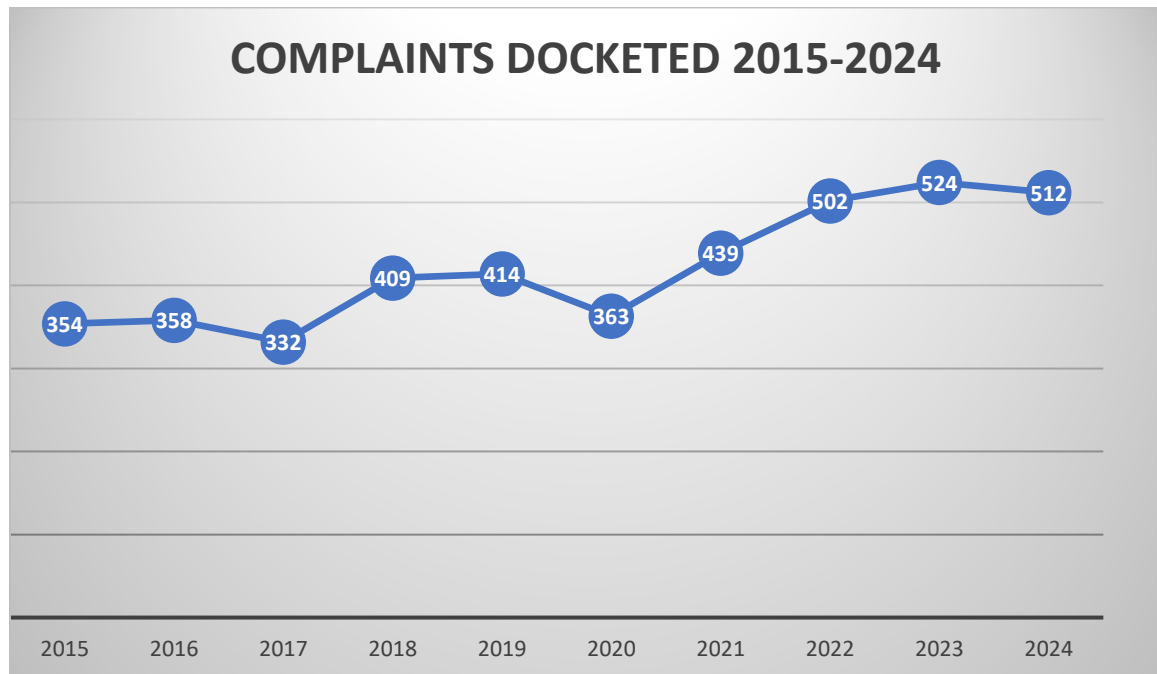
If the investigation of a complaint suggests that a judge's conduct warrants a sanction greater than a public reprimand – i.e., censure, suspension, or removal – the Commission's chairperson may appoint an investigative panel comprised of three Commission members (one judge, one lawyer, and one public member) to determine whether reasonable cause exists to believe the judge has engaged in misconduct. If the investigative panel makes such a finding, disciplinary counsel files formal charges against the judge, and the matter proceeds to an evidentiary hearing. Based on the record developed in the formal proceeding, the hearing panel – comprised of Commission members who did not serve on the investigative panel – issues written findings of fact, conclusions of law, and a recommendation regarding the appropriate disposition. The final decision in a formal proceeding rests with the Arizona Supreme Court.

Complainants are not parties to Commission proceedings. Although complainants may be asked to provide information during investigations or to testify at formal hearings, the only parties to the proceedings are the judge and the Commission. The judge may be represented by counsel at his or her own expense. The judge and the Commission may conduct discovery and subpoena witnesses to testify at hearings.

## FILING TRENDS

In 2024, the Commission docketed 512 new complaints – approximately a 2% decrease from the prior year. Excluding 2020 when fewer court hearings were held due to pandemic restrictions, the number of filings has been steadily increasing since 2017. Staff attributes the increase in complaint filings to more self-represented litigants in the system who lack an attorney to help explain legal procedures and processes, as well as a general decrease by the public in trust and confidence in the judiciary, and government in general.

The following chart depicts new complaint filings over a 10-year period:



Due to vacancies in the disciplinary counsel/staff attorney position in 2021 and 2022, a backlog in complaint processing occurred. In August 2023, the Commission was able to hire a second disciplinary counsel/staff attorney utilizing grant funds to assist in the resolution of the backlog. The Commission continues to seek permanent funding for this position from the legislature, but may lose this position at the end of FY2026 if alternative funding cannot be found. The additional position assisted in decreasing the backlog and increased processing times for complaints.

In 2024, the Commission entered dispositional orders on 577 complaints and 35 motions for reconsideration. As of December 31, 2024, the Commission had resolved 99% of the complaints filed in 2023, and had resolved approximately 72% of

the complaints filed in 2024. The remaining complaints filed in 2023 and 2024 are pending investigation and review by the Commission, or have already been disposed of by the Commission in 2025.

In 2024, the Commission was able to purchase a much-needed case management system, with funding assistance from the Arizona Supreme Court. The switch to the new system occurred approximately mid-year. The new system will allow the Commission to provide more robust reports, including such statistics as the areas of law a complaint relates to, the type of complainant, and the type of judge. Due to some concerns about the transfer of data from the old system to the new system, such statistics are not in this year's report. However, the Commission's 2025 Annual Report is expected to contain this additional information based on an entire year's worth of data in the new system.

## 2024 DISPOSITIONS

The following are brief summaries of the complaints that resulted in formal sanctions, a public reprimand, or a dismissal with a warning or advisory comment during calendar year 2024. The public record regarding reprimand cases is available on the Commission's website – [www.azcourts.gov/azcjc](http://www.azcourts.gov/azcjc). More limited information is also available on the website regarding dismissed complaints. See Commission Rule 9.

Unless otherwise specified, all rule references in the summaries are to the Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct:

### **Formal Proceedings (2)**

**Justice of the Peace Juan M. Guerrero** received a consolidated censure from the Arizona Supreme Court in Case Nos. 23-181 and 23-474. Judge Guerrero was convicted of a misdemeanor DUI. Additionally, Judge Guerrero performed weddings during court hours and received a fee for weddings performed during court hours. He also improperly utilized a county vehicle for his personal use and used the county fuel card to purchase approximately \$400 worth of gas for his personal use. In stipulating to the censure, Judge Guerrero agreed that his conduct violated Rules 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 3.1(E), and 3.16(D) of the Code and constituted conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice that brings the judicial office into disrepute, in violation of Article 6.1, section 4, of the Arizona Constitution. He resigned and agreed never to seek judicial office in the future.

## Reprimands (5)

**Superior Court Judge Susanna C. Pineda** received a consolidated reprimand in Case Nos. 23-507 and 24-043 for posting social media content opining on the conflict in Israel and Gaza following the attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, and also on historical events in the region prior to that date. These posts appeared on Judge Pineda's social media account starting in mid-October 2023 until early December 2023, and some of her posts included video links to other speakers who expressed controversial opinions regarding these same subjects. Judge Pineda is readily identifiable as a judicial officer on her social media account, and the posts were available to other judges, court staff, and some other acquaintances. Her conduct violated Rule 1.2 (a judge shall "act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety). Her conduct called into question her impartiality, particularly as in some postings, the tone or language of the posted content was overtly antisemitic or reasonably interpreted as such.

**Superior Court Judge David Thorn** was publicly reprimanded in Case No. 23-508 for improperly issuing a civil arrest warrant to a non-party in a probate proceeding who was never notified of the time and date of a court hearing, or of any consequence for failing to appear. The individual was arrested and spent time in jail as a result of the improperly issued warrant. Judge Thorn's conduct violated Rule 1.2 ("A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary, and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety"), Rule 2.5(A) ("A judge shall perform judicial and administrative duties competently, diligently, and promptly"), and Rule 2.6(A) ("A judge shall accord to every person who has a legal interest in a proceeding, or that person's lawyer, the right to be heard according to law").

**Superior Court Judge Jo Lynn Gentry** received a reprimand in Case No. 24-128 for a severely delayed ruling in a criminal case. The motion for reconsideration was originally filed on July 17, 2023, and Judge Gentry failed to rule upon the motion within sixty days of submittal. After the attorney's reminder notice to the court was ignored, the attorney ultimately filed a petition for special action with the Court of Appeals. On February 12, 2024, the Court of Appeals directed Judge Gentry to issue her ruling within thirty days, however, she did not issue the ruling until March 19, 2024. Judge Gentry admitted to signing erroneous payroll certifications that she had no matters pending for more than sixty days during the time period the ruling was overdue. The Commission found that Judge Gentry's conduct violated the following provisions of the Code of Judicial Conduct and Arizona law: Rule 1.1 ("A judge shall comply with the law, including the Code of Judicial Conduct"), Rule 1.2 ("A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary, and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety"), Rule 2.5(A) ("A judge shall perform judicial and administrative duties competently, diligently, and promptly"),

Article 2, Section 11 of the Arizona Constitution, Article 6, Section 21 of the Arizona Constitution, Rule 91(e), Arizona Rules of Supreme Court, and A.R.S. §12-128.01.

**Superior Court Judge David Thorn** was publicly reprimanded in Case No. 24-110 for a severely delayed ruling in a family law matter. A petition to modify legal decision-making, parenting time, and child support was filed on February 27, 2024, but Judge Thorn failed to take action on the petition, despite the attorney making numerous inquiries to Judge Thorn’s judicial assistant. The attorney ultimately filed a petition for special action with the Court of Appeals on February 27, 2024. On March 5, 2024, the Court of Appeals directed Judge Thorn to issue a ruling, and before the response deadline, the attorney sought to withdraw the petition stating the matter had been resolved. Judge Thorn noted that he acted immediately upon learning of the special action. He also stated that there were issues with his prior judicial assistant, including over 1000 unopened emails and several unanswered phone messages. Judge Thorn admitted that some attorneys had expressed concern to him regarding communication issues with his judicial assistant, but his judicial assistant always reassured him the matters had been addressed. Judge Thorn alluded to other communication issues between the Clerk’s office and judges, and he acknowledged that he signed payroll certifications that inaccurately stated he had no matters due and pending for more than sixty days. The Commission found that Judge Thorn’s conduct violated the following provisions of the Code of Judicial Conduct and Arizona law: Rule 1.1 (“A judge shall comply with the law, including the Code of Judicial Conduct”), Rule 1.2 (“A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary, and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety”), Rule 2.5(A) (“A judge shall perform judicial and administrative duties competently, diligently, and promptly”), Article 2, Section 11 of the Arizona Constitution, Article 6, Section 21 of the Arizona Constitution, Rule 91(e), Arizona Rules of Supreme Court, and A.R.S. §12-128.01.

### **Warnings and Advisories**

When the Commission dismisses a complaint, it may choose to include warning or advisory language. The Commission may include advisory language when a judge has not technically violated the Code, but members believe the judge could benefit from advice about a particular Code-based issue. Warnings are generally issued when the Commission believes a judge either came close to violating the Code or when an actual violation has occurred, but the members conclude that mitigating circumstances dictate against the issuance of a public sanction.

The Commission issued 11 warnings and 4 advisories in 2024, which are summarized as follows:

## Warnings

- The Commission issued a warning letter to a superior court judge reminding him of his obligations to issue rulings in a timely manner after a delayed ruling in a post-conviction proceeding. *See* Rules 1.1 and 2.5(A), Art. 2, Sec. 11 and Art. 6, Sec. 21 of the Arizona Constitution, and A.R.S §12-128.01.
- A pro tem city court judge received a warning for improper statements to an attorney regarding his request for a continuance of the trial date. *See* Rules 1.2, 2.2 and 2.10 of the Code.
- A superior court commissioner was warned regarding a delayed ruling in a probate matter. *See* Rule 2.5(A), A.R.S. § 12-128.01, and Art. 2, Sec. 11 and Art. 6, Sec. 21 of the Arizona Constitution.
- The Commission issued a warning letter to a superior court judge reminding the judge not to modify a criminal sentence without giving the parties notice and opportunity to be heard. *See* Rule 2.6(A).
- A superior court judge was issued a warning regarding a delayed ruling in a petition to seal records matter. *See* Rule 2.5(A), A.R.S. § 12-128.01, and Art. 2, Sec. 11 and Art. 6, Sec. 21 of the Arizona Constitution.
- A pro tem municipal court judge received a warning reminding for improper demeanor and failing to allow a party to raise a jurisdictional issue. *See* Rules 2.6(A) and 2.8(B).
- The Commission issued a warning letter to a superior court judge for a severely delayed ruling in a civil matter. *See* Rules 1.1 and 2.5(A), Art. 2, Sec. 11 and Art. 6, Sec. 21 of the Arizona Constitution, and A.R.S §12-128.01.
- A justice of the peace received a warning for failing to resign their judicial position before becoming a candidate for another public office. *See* Rule 4.5(A).
- A justice of the peace was warned for publicly endorsing another candidate for public office. *See* Rule 4.1(A)(3).
- The Commission issued a warning letter to a superior court commissioner for failing to allow cross-examination of a witness in a protective order proceeding. *See* Rules 1.1 and 2.6(A).
- A superior court judge received a warning for improperly limiting cross-examination (applying the standard under the federal rule of evidence rather than the state rule) and walking off the bench while a record was being made. *See* Rules 1.1, 1.2, and 2.6(A).

## Advisories

- The Commission issued a consolidated advisory letter to a justice of the peace in two matters reminding her of her obligations under Rules 1.1, 1.2, and 2.1 of the Code and to take greater care with her schedule and her communications with staff.
- A superior court commissioner was advised of their obligations to issue timely rulings on a request to seal a case. *See* Rules 1.1 and 2.5(A), Art. 2, Sec. 11 and Art. 6, Sec. 21 of the Arizona Constitution, and A.R.S §12-128.01.
- Following a self-report, the Commission issued an advisory to a superior court commissioner reminding of the obligation to issue timely rulings in a probate matter. *See* Rules 1.1 and 2.5(A), Art. 2, Sec. 11 and Art. 6, Sec. 21 of the Arizona Constitution, and A.R.S §12-128.01.
- The Commission issued an advisory to a city court judge reminding of the obligation not to independently investigate matters. *See* Rule 2.9(C).

## Public Dismissal Orders (1)

As the next section of this report explains, most dismissal orders do not make the name of the judge(s) public. On occasion, however, the Commission determines, or the Commission and respondent judge agree, that a dismissal order will be made public. In 2024, one such order was issued, and to ensure more transparency, these public dismissals are noted in a separate category on the Commission's website – Other Public Dispositions.

- Case No. 22-284 (Justice of the Peace Samuel T. Goodman): Maricopa County Justice of the Peace, San Tan Precinct, Samuel T. Goodman resigned and agreed not seek judicial office in the future. In reaching the stipulated resolution with the Commission, Judge Goodman made no admissions. The complaint alleged violations of numerous employment laws and personnel rules, including sexual harassment of a female employee, as well as alleged retaliatory conduct against employees who reported his misconduct or cooperated with the investigation of misconduct.

## Dismissals

Most docketed complaints are dismissed because the alleged misconduct cannot be substantiated by clear and convincing evidence or because the conduct at issue is not an ethical violation. Many complainants, for example, assert that a judge ruled against them because the judge was biased, inattentive, or incompetent. But absent a pattern of error or intentional disregard of the law, an erroneous legal ruling

is not grounds for judicial discipline. Litigants who are aggrieved by legal rulings must instead pursue their appellate remedies.

Under the Commission's rules, after a complaint is dismissed, the names of the complainant and the judge, as well as other identifying information, are redacted from the public record. The redacted complaint and the dispositional order are available for public review and are posted on the Commission's website.

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Arizona Constitution dictates the Commission's membership, which consists of eleven individuals serving six-year terms. Six judges are appointed by the Arizona Supreme Court: two from the court of appeals, two from the superior court, one from a justice court, and one from a municipal court. Two attorney members are appointed by the State Bar of Arizona. Three public members – who cannot be attorneys or active or retired judges – are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate.

Members are not compensated, but receive reimbursement for actual expenses incurred in serving on the Commission. The Commission meets periodically throughout the year and is supported by staff located in the Arizona State Courts Building in Phoenix.

During 2024, the Commission's members were:

### **Arizona Court of Appeals, Division One**

**Michael J. Brown** is a judge on the Arizona Court of Appeals. He served as the Chief Judge of Division One from 2015 to 2017, after serving the prior two years as the Vice Chief Judge. He has also served on various committees, including the Arizona Judicial Council, Commission on Technology, Judicial Ethics Working Group, Appellate Case Processing Standards, and Connecting with the Community.

Judge Brown graduated from Brigham Young University in 1989 and received his J.D. from Arizona State University in 1992. After working as a law clerk for the Honorable Thomas C. Kleinschmidt, he worked as an attorney with Brown & Brown Law Offices, P.C., in northeastern Arizona, until his judicial appointment in 2006.

### **Arizona Court of Appeals, Division Two**

**Christopher P. Staring** (Commission Chair) graduated from the University of California at Davis in 1983, with a B.A. He received his law degree from Tulane University Law School in 1986.

Judge Staring practiced from 1986 to 2010 with the law firm of Fennemore Craig, P.C. In 2010, he was appointed to the Pima County Superior Court, where he served in civil, juvenile and probate bench assignments. In 2015, he was appointed to the Arizona Court of Appeals, Division Two.

Judge Staring has served on the Commission since 2019. He served on the Arizona Commission on Judicial Performance Review, 2012-2019. Judge Staring

served on the Arizona Supreme Court Committee on Mental Health and the Justice System, and serves on the Arizona Supreme Court Committee on Juvenile Courts.

### **Arizona Superior Court, Maricopa County**

**Joseph C. Kreamer** (Commission Vice-Chair) is a Maricopa County Superior Court Judge, assigned to a criminal court calendar. He was appointed to the Bench in June, 2007. He previously served as the Court's Associate Presiding Judge, the juvenile department Presiding Judge, the criminal department Associate Presiding Judge, the family department Associate Presiding Judge, and the Presiding Judge for the Northeast Courthouse in Phoenix.

Judge Kreamer grew up in Tucson and attended the University of Arizona for both undergraduate and law school. Prior to joining the Bench, he was a civil trial lawyer at Snell & Wilmer in Phoenix for seven years, then a partner in the firm of Hopkins & Kreamer for ten years. His practice concentrated on personal injury and commercial litigation.

Judge Kreamer has been actively involved in numerous court and state-wide boards, committees, and task forces, focusing on access to justice issues. He is currently a Board Member of the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education (the Bar Foundation). He is a member of the Arizona Commission on Access to Justice, chairing the Judicial and Attorney Engagement Workgroup. He is the former co-chair of the statewide General Jurisdiction New Judge Orientation program. Judge Kreamer also received the 2021 James A. Walsh Outstanding Jurist Award from the State Bar of Arizona.

### **Arizona Superior Court, Pinal County**

**Delia R. Neal** currently serves on the civil bench for the Pinal County Superior Court. She previously served as a Court Commissioner from 2012 until 2016 when she was appointed by Gov. Doug Ducey to serve as a divisional judge for Pinal County Superior Court. Judge Neal currently serves as the Specialty Court Judge, presiding over Drug Treatment Court, Veterans' Treatment Court, and Mental Health Treatment Court. She previously served as the Presiding Family Court Judge, Presiding Juvenile Court Judge, and the Chief Pretrial Judge.

Judge Neal attended Eastern Michigan University for undergraduate studies and later received her JD from the University of Wyoming. A Wyoming native, Judge Neal moved to Arizona in 1996 where she passed the State Bar and began work as a Deputy County Attorney for Maricopa County Attorney's Office in 1997. Judge Neal also worked as a prosecutor for the City of Scottsdale and the Pinal County Attorney's Office before starting a solo practice and working as a judge pro-tem in Maricopa and Pinal counties. Judge Neal currently serves as the Chief Judicial Education,

Training, and Technology Judge for Pinal County, chairs the Pinal County Technology Governance Board, and serves on the Pinal County COJET Committee. on the Committee on Juvenile Courts and the Supreme Court's Commission on Technology. She previously served as a member of the Committee on Juvenile Courts, the Pretrial Services Committee and previously served as the President of the Arizona Judges Association.

### **Surprise City Court**

**Louis Frank Dominguez** is the Presiding Judge for the Surprise City Court. He was a judge on the Phoenix Municipal Court from October 1994 until March 2013, when he was appointed as the Surprise City Court Presiding Judge. Judge Dominguez received his B.A. in Psychology at Arizona State University and graduated from the Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law.

Judge Dominguez is a member of the Arizona Judicial Council. He is a current member, former Chair, and former Vice-Chair of the Commission on Judicial Conduct. He served as a member of the Arizona Task Force on the Code of Judicial Conduct in 2008 and 2009. Judge Dominguez has served as faculty for the Arizona Supreme Court, the State Bar of Arizona, the National College on Judicial Conduct and Ethics, the American Bar Association, the National Judicial College, and other organizations on various law-related topics. He has served as Chair of the Arizona Supreme Court Limited Jurisdiction New Judge Orientation Program. Judge Dominguez is a Co-Chair of the Annual Governor's Office of Highway Safety Judicial Traffic Conference. He is a member of the Arizona Magistrates Association, Arizona Minority Judges Caucus, and Los Abogados. In June 2003, he was presented with a "Distinguished Service Award" from the Arizona Supreme Court. In May 2010, the Arizona Supreme Court presented Judge Dominguez with a 2009 Trainer Excellence Award. This award was in recognition of his contributions to the goal of excellence in judicial education and his commitment to serving the Arizona judiciary as faculty. In September 2020, Judge Dominguez received the State Bar of Arizona Public Lawyers Section Justice Michael D. Ryan Award for Judicial Excellence. This award honors a judicial officer who demonstrates a dedication and commitment to improving the justice system. In June 2021, Judge Dominguez received the COJET Excellence in Education Award from the Judicial College of Arizona, a standing committee of the Committee on Judicial Education and Training (COJET). This was in recognition of outstanding performance and dedicated service to the Arizona Courts in judicial education.

Judge Dominguez is a Past Board Chair of Valley Leadership. His volunteer efforts focus on working with youth in the community and leadership development. In April 1998, Judge Dominguez received a "Distinguished Leadership Award" from the National Association of Community Leadership.

Judge Dominguez concluded his 17-year tenure with the Commission at the expiration of his term on December 31, 2024. Chandler Municipal Court Judge Scott Silva was appointed to the city court judicial member position on the Commission effective January 1, 2025. His biography will appear in the 2025 Annual Report.

### **North Canyon Justice Court**

**Barbara J. Brown** has worked for Mohave County in the North Canyon Justice Court (previously known as the Moccasin Court) and the Colorado City Magistrate Court since January of 1989. She has served as a Court Clerk, Office Supervisor, Special Master, Pro Tem, and now the elected Justice of the Peace and appointed Magistrate. She has taught various subjects, including judicial demeanor sessions for the Arizona Supreme Court Education Division, served as a Subject Matter Expert for mock hearings, served as a Mentor Judge for New Judge Orientation since 2015, taught at the annual Arizona Traffic conference and the National American Bar Association Traffic Conference on the issue of masking of commercial trucking violations. She was awarded the *2017 Justice of the Peace of the Year* award. She now, or in the past, has served on various committees and boards, including the Constable Ethics and Standard Board, the Supreme Court Committee on Judicial Education and Training, the Arizona Justice of the Peace Association Board, and many subcommittees.

Judge Barbara Brown concluded her six-year tenure with the Commission at the expiration of her term on December 31, 2024. Desert Ridge Justice of the Peace Cathy Riggs was appointed to the justice of the peace judicial member position on the Commission effective January 1, 2025. Her biography will appear in the 2025 Annual Report.

### **Lawyer Members**

**Denise K. Aguilar** is an attorney member of the Commission. She has been licensed to practice law in Arizona since 2004. Denise works for the Federal Public Defender as CJA Resource Counsel for the United States District Court for the District of Arizona. She received her B.A. in Criminal Justice from New Mexico State University and Juris Doctorate from the University of New Mexico School of Law.

**Regina L. Nassen** has been a Principal Assistant City Attorney in the Tucson City Attorney's Office since August 2021 after almost 18 years as a Deputy County Attorney in the Civil Division of the Pima County Attorney's Office ("PCAO"). While at PCAO, Regina also served as the Supervising Attorney of the Civil Division's Business & Transactions Unit and as PCAO's Chief Ethics Counsel. Prior to becoming a government lawyer, she was in private practice as an Associate with Snell & Wilmer from 1993 to 2000.

Ms. Nassen served on the Arizona Supreme Court's Ethics Advisory Committee for five years, from 2019 through 2023, and is a member of the ABA's Center for Professional Responsibility CLE Committee and a fellow of the American Bar Foundation. She is a member of the governing council of the ABA's Government & Public Sector Lawyers Division and a past Chair of the State Bar of Arizona's Public Lawyers Section. Ms. Nassen has presented or moderated numerous CLE presentations on legal ethics, real estate practice, state constitutional law, and legal writing. She is a recipient of the State Bar of Arizona's Public Lawyers Section Distinguished Public Lawyer Award.

Ms. Nassen graduated summa cum laude from the University of Arizona College of Law in 1992, after which she clerked for Justice Frederick Martone on the Arizona Supreme Court before entering private practice. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of Northern Iowa in 1986.

### **Public Members**

**Roger Barton** is the owner of Badger Roofing, a Prescott-area licensed residential and commercial roofing contractor business. Roger is a native of Arizona, with more than 30 years of experience in sales and marketing of a variety of products and services. Throughout his career, he has sought opportunities to serve within the communities he has resided in and has volunteered on a number of boards of organizations.

**Colleen E. Concannon** (Commission Secretary) is an Accountant and Project Management Professional with RCSC, LLC. She is a native Tucsonan who received her bachelor's degree from the University of Arizona, a Master of Public Administration from the University of North Texas, and a Master of Science in Accounting/IT from the University of Houston. She has worked in information technology, executive management, finance, and project management in both the public and private sectors throughout her career. She is also a dedicated community volunteer and has served as a board member for numerous public and private organizations within the State of Arizona.

**Scott H. O'Connor** was appointed as a public member to the Commission in November 2024. He retired from a 44-year career in commercial real estate and development in 2023. He now works with his son and wife in their respective startup businesses. A fourth-generation Arizonan, he comes from a family with a tradition of public service. He gained experience with the judicial system through years of expert witness appearances in Maricopa County Superior Court and federal bankruptcy courts, as well as through plaintiff actions in civil courts on behalf of business entities he managed. A resident of Paradise Valley, he served on several town boards and commissions and was elected to the Town Council for two terms. He has also served on numerous non-profit and cultural institute boards.

## **EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH**

Members of the Commission, as well as Commission staff, regularly participate in programs designed to educate judges, court staff, and judicial candidates about their ethical obligations and about Commission procedures. A sampling of programs that Commission members and staff participated in during 2024 includes:

- Limited Jurisdiction New Judge Orientation
- General Jurisdiction New Judge Orientation
- Cochise County COJET Conference
- Maricopa County Justices of the Peace, Pro Tems, and Hearing Officers Training
- Pima County Justices of the Peace Training
- Pinal County COJET Conference
- Pinal County Superior Court Bench Training
- Small Claims Hearing Officer Training
- Civil Hearing Officer Training
- Ethics Presentations at the Arizona Judicial Conference
- Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) Judicial Staff Training
- Supreme Court and Court of Appeals Law Clerk Training
- Limited Jurisdiction Judges' Association Conference
- National Association of Judicial Disciplinary Counsel Annual Conference

## **COMMISSION FINANCES**

The Commission is funded through the legislature's general fund appropriation to the Arizona judicial branch. The Commission's budget totals approximately \$610,000.00. Employee compensation, benefits, and rent account for more than 90% of the Commission's budget.

## **COMMISSION STAFF**

The Commission's permanently funded staff consists of an executive director, one full-time lawyer, a commission specialist, and an administrative assistant. The Commission also has an employee who works four hours per week to support its database and related technology. Through grant-funding, the Commission employs a second full-time staff attorney.

In addition to the 512 new complaints opened in 2024, Commission staff fielded approximately 970 telephone inquiries, handled eight public records requests, and docketed 49 potential cases and general inquiries.

**April P. Elliott** is Executive Director of the Commission and Staff Director for the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee. She is an active member of the State Bar of Arizona, and she previously served as the Commission's Disciplinary Counsel from 2014-2021. Ms. Elliott was a judge on the Pinal County Superior Court from 2005-2006, and she served as a judge pro tem for both Pinal County Superior Courts and Justice Courts from 2002-2005. Before becoming a judge, Ms. Elliott was in private practice for 10 years in Casa Grande, Arizona, handling a variety of case types. Following her service on the bench, she worked at the Pinal County Public Defender's Office until she joined the Commission in October 2014. She received both her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Arizona, serving as Managing Editor for the *Arizona Law Review* from 1994-95.

**Brian Bohan** joined the Commission in August 2023 and serves as Disciplinary Counsel/Staff Attorney. Mr. Bohan was most recently in private practice, handling primarily criminal cases. Prior to that, he spent 28 years in the Pinal County Public Defender's Office. While there, he served as a Capital Attorney, as well as helped create and run several of the specialty courts that now handle the bulk of the criminal cases in Pinal county. He also has experience as a solo general practitioner. Mr. Bohan received both his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Arizona.

**L. Ashley Fritz** briefly served as the second Disciplinary Counsel/Staff Attorney in 2024. She left the Commission in early 2025 to become the educational training officer for the Maricopa County Justice Courts.

**David Cunanan** serves as Independent Bar Counsel pursuant to Arizona Supreme Court Administrative Order 2018-20. This part-time position is supervised by the Commission's Executive Director and is housed in the Commission's office. Mr. Cunanan investigates and resolves, through the lawyer discipline process, complaints filed against lawyers that, for conflict-of-interest reasons, cannot be handled by the State Bar's lawyer regulation staff. If his schedule permits, he also assists the Commission in investigating and resolving judicial conduct complaints. Mr. Cunanan is a retired Maricopa County Superior Court judge.

**Kimberly Welch** serves as Commission Specialist – a position she has held since March of 2014. Ms. Welch has worked in the legal field for over 35 years, including positions with large national law firms, where she assisted with complex civil litigation, government contracts, corporate and taxation law, and tort litigation. She is a certified small business manager.

**Dora Ruelas Lucio** joined the Commission as an Administrative Assistant in May 2023. Prior to joining the Commission, Ms. Ruelas Rivera worked for a personal injury attorney for eight years, and was previously employed in various call centers. She holds an associate degree in management.