

State of Arizona
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Disposition of Complaint 26-119

Judge:

Complainant:

ORDER

May 28, 2026

The Complainant alleged a superior court commissioner failed to follow the law in a criminal case by issuing a lenient sentence and was biased.

The role of the Commission on Judicial Conduct is to impartially determine whether a judicial officer has engaged in conduct that violates the Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct or Article 6.1 of the Arizona Constitution. There must be clear and convincing evidence of such a violation in order for the Commission to take disciplinary action against a judicial officer. In this instance, the Commission found no evidence of any violation.

The Commission received multiple complaints regarding the sentence issued by the judicial officer in an animal abuse/cruelty case. Additionally, an animal rights website urged individuals who disagreed with the decision to file complaints with the Commission. Due to the volume of complaints and the web criticism, the Commission has chosen to issue this explanatory statement.

The sentence issued by the commissioner was within the lawful sentencing range for the crime of which the defendant was convicted, a class 5 felony. The commissioner's sentence exceeded the recommended sentence requested by the State. The defendant has appealed his conviction, and it will be up to an appellate court to determine if the conviction/sentence in this matter should be affirmed or reversed.

The complainants generally expressed that they felt the sentence in the defendant's case was too lenient. The Commission is not a reviewing or appellate court. It is a regulatory body. The Commission has no power to reverse judicial decisions or to direct any court to do so.

After reviewing all relevant evidence available, the Commission concluded that there was no evidence of any Code violation. The complaint is therefore dismissed pursuant to Commission Rules 16(a) and 23(a).

Dated: May 28, 2026

FOR THE COMMISSION

/s/ Christopher P. Staring

Hon. Christopher P. Staring
Commission Chair

Copies of this order were distributed to all
appropriate persons on May 28, 2026.

CONFIDENTIAL

Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct
1501 W. Washington Street, Suite 229
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

2026-199

COMPLAINT AGAINST A JUDGE

Name:

Judge's Name:

Commissioner

Instructions: Use this form or plain paper of the same size to file a complaint. Describe in your own words what you believe the judge did that constitutes judicial misconduct. Be specific and list all of the names, dates, times, and places that will help the commission understand your concerns. Additional pages may be attached along with copies (not originals) of relevant court documents. Please complete one side of the paper only, and keep a copy of the complaint for your records.

I am filing this complaint regarding the conduct of _____ County _____ Court Commissioner
_____ in the sentencing of State of Arizona v _____ sentenced on _____

A jury convicted _____ of felony animal cruelty for killing a neighbor's _____ by striking him repeatedly with a shovel. Surveillance footage captured multiple downward blows and the subsequent disposal of the dog's body over a wall. The injuries were so severe that the dog was euthanized. Under Arizona law, this conduct constitutes a Class 5 felony, carrying a potential sentence of up to 2.5 years in prison.

Despite the violent nature of the offense, the repeated strikes, the fatal outcome, and the jury's findings, Commissioner _____ imposed a sentence of _____ days in jail and _____ years of probation. This sentence bears no meaningful relationship to the severity of the conduct proven at trial or to the statutory framework governing Class 5 felonies.

The issue before the Commission is not the legal outcome itself, but whether Commissioner _____ exercised the level of competence, judgment, and ethical responsibility required of a judicial officer when handling a violent felony case. The sentencing decision reflects:

A failure to appreciate the gravity of a violent offense involving repeated blows to a small dog resulting in death

A failure to apply statutory sentencing factors in a manner consistent with the seriousness of the conduct

A failure to address the defendant's false testimony, despite clear video evidence contradicting his claims

A failure to impose conditions commonly associated with violent offenses, such as psychological evaluation or restrictions on future contact with animals

These omissions collectively raise substantial concerns under the Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct, including:

Canon 1: Obligation to promote public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary

Canon 2: Obligation to perform judicial duties competently and diligently

Canon 2.2: Obligation to apply the law fairly and impartially

Canon 2.8(A): Obligation to maintain public confidence through appropriate judicial conduct

A violent felony resulting in death, supported by video evidence and a jury conviction, followed by a _____ day sentence, creates the appearance of disregard for the law, disregard for the evidence, and disregard for the seriousness of the offense. The public is entitled to expect that judicial officers will exercise sound judgment, apply statutory sentencing ranges appropriately, and recognize aggravating factors such as false testimony. Commissioner _____'s handling of this case does not meet those expectations.

For these reasons, I request that the Commission review Commissioner _____'s conduct to determine whether her sentencing decision reflects a violation of the ethical obligations imposed on judicial officers in the State of Arizona.