

State of Arizona
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Disposition of Complaint 26-128

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**COMPLAINT AGAINST A JUDGE**

Name:

Judge's Name:

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.

Complaint to the Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct

Judicial Officer: _____, Commissioner

Court: _____ County _____ Court

Case Name: State of Arizona v. _____

Case Number: _____

Relevant Hearing Date: _____ (Sentencing Hearing)

Location: _____ County, Arizona

I respectfully request that the Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct review the conduct of Commissioner _____ in connection with the sentencing proceeding in the above-referenced case.

Background

On _____, a small dog named _____ entered the yard of defendant _____ in _____, Arizona. According to police and publicly reported information, the incident was captured on surveillance video showing the defendant repeatedly striking the dog with a shovel and then throwing the dog's body back over the wall.

_____ died from these injuries. On _____, the _____ Police Department recommended felony animal cruelty charges. A _____ County grand jury returned an indictment against the defendant on _____.

The case proceeded in _____ County _____ Court. According to publicly available appellate docket records, the defendant was convicted by a jury of one count of domestic animal cruelty, mistreatment, a Class 5 felony.

Sentencing

On _____, Commissioner _____ conducted the sentencing hearing in _____ County _____ Court.

Public reports and court records indicate that the defendant was sentenced to _____ days in jail and _____ years of probation following the felony conviction.

Concerns Regarding Judicial Conduct**1. Appearance of Disproportionate Sentencing**

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Phoenix, Arizona 85007

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The offense involved the killing of a domestic animal allegedly documented on surveillance video and resulted in a jury conviction for felony animal cruelty. The sentence imposed— days in jail—appears extremely lenient relative to the seriousness of the offense and the evidence presented.

While sentencing decisions fall within judicial discretion, outcomes that appear grossly disproportionate to the nature of the offense may raise concerns regarding whether the court fully and fairly considered the severity of the conduct.

2. Public Confidence in the Judiciary

The Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct requires judicial officers to act in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. The handling of this case has generated significant public concern due to the violent nature of the incident and the existence of video evidence.

When a case involving a felony conviction and alleged video documentation of extreme conduct results in a minimal custodial sentence, it can create the appearance that the seriousness of the offense was not adequately recognized by the court.

Request for Review

I respectfully request that the Commission review the sentencing proceedings conducted on _____, including:

- the sentencing transcript
- the sentencing order and minute entry
- statements made by Commissioner _____ explaining the sentence imposed

This review will help determine whether the judicial conduct in this matter complied with the standards required by the Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct and whether the proceedings maintained public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary.

Respectfully submitted,