

**In the
Supreme Court of Indiana**

IN THE MATTER OF

THE HONORABLE

JOHN M. PLUMMER III

JUDGE OF

LAWRENCE SUPERIOR COURT I

Case No: 26S-JD-115

**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 the Honorable John M. Plummer III (“Respondent”) of the following 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 Respondent, while serving as a Judge of Lawrence Superior Court I, engaged in judicial misconduct as set forth below. Under Admission and Discipline Rule 25VIII (F), Respondent may file a written Answer to these Charges within twenty (20) days of service.

BACKGROUND

1. Respondent was admitted to the Indiana Bar on June 14, 1996.
2. As an attorney, Respondent had a general practice with his father, focusing on criminal defense before becoming a judge.
3. Respondent was appointed to the Lawrence Superior Court 1 in 2018 and then elected to the same on November 5, 2024.
4. At all times pertinent to these Charges, Respondent presided over a general jurisdiction docket that included criminal and civil cases, as well as the domestic violence court.

SUMMARY

5. These Charges arise from a personal crisis Respondent experienced between February and May 2025, the effects of which spilled into the Lawrence County court system and broader community. During that period, court staff, attorneys, fellow judges, and county officials observed significant changes in Respondent's demeanor, judgment, and emotional stability, prompting concern for his well-being. As set out more fully below, those personal stressors manifested in conduct that undermined public confidence in the judiciary. Respondent has been on paid, voluntary leave of absence from the bench since September 23, 2025.

FACTS GIVING RISE TO MISCONDUCT CHARGES

6. On April 30, 2025, Respondent appeared before the Lawrence County Council to address court-related budgetary matters. During the meeting, Respondent spoke at length, exhibited pressured speech, and made comments that were tangential to the matters under

consideration. Afterward, witnesses expressed concern that his presentation and conduct appeared erratic and suggested possible impairment.

7. One witness described Respondent as increasingly erratic and difficult to engage, in contrast to his prior professional and approachable manner. The employee observed that Respondent frequently isolated himself in chambers, appeared visibly upset upon arrival, and created an atmosphere in which staff felt anxious and uncomfortable in his presence.

8. Another witness reported that Respondent became increasingly unable to remain focused on proceedings, frequently fidgeted, and went on extended, irrelevant tangents from the bench that included personal and inappropriate subject matter.

9. Another witness reported episodes in which Respondent reacted with disproportionate anger toward routine questions or administrative issues, including berating staff and colleagues during meetings.

10. On May 12, 2025, Lawrence County Judge (“Judge 1”) met with Respondent in chambers after receiving reports raising concerns about Respondent’s behavior and stability. During that meeting, Judge 1 observed that Respondent spoke rapidly, appeared visibly agitated, and exhibited flashes of anger. Respondent denied any misconduct and attributed the community’s concerns to rumor and speculation.

11. On May 14, 2025, Respondent met with Judge 1 and a retired Judge (“Judge 2”) to discuss concerns about his well-being and ability to perform judicial duties. During that meeting, Respondent appeared emotionally unstable.

12. Later that day, while having lunch with Judge 2, Respondent disclosed for the first time that he had been consuming marijuana obtained in Michigan.

13. On June 27, 2025, the Commission issued a Notice of Investigation advising the Respondent that it was investigating concerns relating to potential issues raised about his alleged drug use and/or impairment and substance use, and requested a written response addressing those concerns.

14. On August 11, 2025, Respondent submitted his response to the Notice of Investigation. In his response, Respondent admitted that he had consumed illicit drugs while serving as judge of the Lawrence Superior Court. Specifically, Respondent admitted that he told Judge 2 he had, on occasion, used a small amount of THC to help him sleep.

15. During its investigation, the Commission obtained information showing that Respondent's marijuana use during the relevant period was more extensive than Respondent's initial account suggested.

16. Additionally, Respondent's subsequent sworn testimony reflected materially different descriptions of his marijuana use.

17. Through its investigation, the Commission learned that Respondent admitted to three other people that he had been vaping marijuana between February and May 2025.

18. In or around mid-June 2025, Respondent admitted to at least one person ("Witness 1") that he vaped marijuana at a rate of "5 puffs daily," with the most recent use occurring just the night before an appointment with Witness 1.

19. In a November 17, 2025, deposition, Respondent was equivocal and not forthcoming when directly asked about his marijuana use. Respondent repeatedly qualified his answers, claimed not to recall key details, and gave differing descriptions of the form, timing, and extent of marijuana use. Respondent also denied other marijuana-related conduct when asked directly.

20. Respondent's sworn testimony that contradicts his prior admissions to marijuana use includes the following:

- a. "I don't know if it was – I can't remember if I told [Judge 2] it was a vape or if it was a gummy or whatever, but – I can't remember."
- b. He told Judge 2 that he only used a marijuana gummy "that one time."
- c. "I don't remember what she gave me. I think it was – I thought it was a gummy."
- d. "She might have," given Respondent a vape.
- e. "[I vaped] in college, but it was just that one time...that I told [Judge 2] about."
- f. In response to a direct question about whether he had ever vaped before, Respondent replied, "No. I don't think we had a vape in college."
- g. In response to a direct question about whether he uses alcohol or other substances, Respondent replied, "No. In fact – and I was just trying to tell you that no, I do not."
- h. Later in the deposition, Respondent denied ever having vaped in the last five (5) or ten (10) years. When asked directly if he had ever vaped marijuana, he stated, "Like I said earlier, no."
- i. In response to a direct question about whether he purchased marijuana in Michigan, Respondent replied, "No. I never did."

21. Taken in its totality, Respondent's testimony reflected a materially inconsistent and incomplete account of his marijuana use during the relevant period.

22. During the Commission's investigation, a family member of Respondent testified that the family member had purchased marijuana products in Michigan and provided

Respondent with cannabis-infused gummies and a disposable vaporizer, while at Respondent's home in Lawrence County, between February and May 2025.

23. Respondent testified that he did not dispute the authenticity of the records documenting his marijuana use but had "reason to dispute that that actually happened."

APPLICABLE JUDICIAL CONDUCT RULES

24. Rule 1.1 of the Indiana Code of Judicial Conduct provides that "A judge shall comply with the law, including the Code of Judicial Conduct."

25. Rule 1.2 of the Indiana Code of Judicial Conduct provides that "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."

26. Rule 2.16(A) of the Indiana Code of Judicial Conduct provides that "A judge shall cooperate and be candid and honest with judicial and lawyer disciplinary agencies."

CHARGES

The Commission incorporates the facts set out in Paragraphs 1-26 into the Charges below.

Count 1

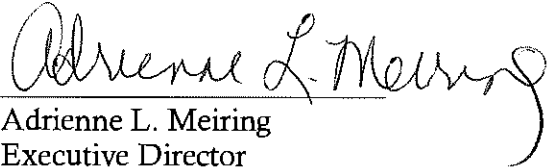
The Commission charges that by knowingly using marijuana in violation of Indiana law while serving as a judicial officer, Respondent failed to comply with the law by consuming illegal drugs and thereby violated Rules 1.1 and 1.2 of the Indiana Code of Judicial Conduct.

Count 2

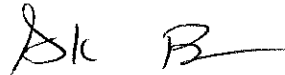
The Commission charges that by using marijuana and failing to provide complete and candid information regarding his illegal drug use, Respondent violated Rules 1.2 and 2.16(A) of the Indiana Code of Judicial Conduct.

WHEREFORE, the Commission respectfully requests that, after Respondent files an Answer, the Indiana Supreme Court appoint three Masters and designate a Presiding Master to conduct a public hearing on the Charges and thereafter find that Respondent committed the alleged judicial misconduct and impose an appropriate sanction.

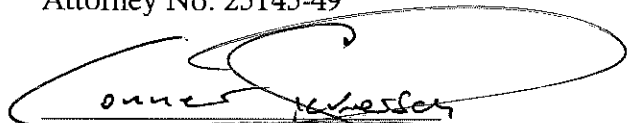
Respectfully submitted,



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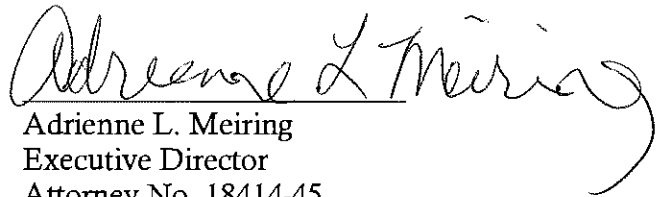
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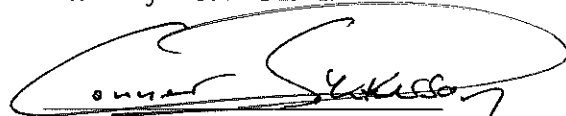
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned certify that on 4-17-2026, a copy of this *Notice of the Institution of Formal Proceedings and Statement of Charges* was electronically filed with the Indiana Supreme Court and sent by certified mail, postage pre-paid and electronically to the following parties:

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