

JUL 14 2025

David J. Smith
Clerk

CONFIDENTIAL

Before the Chief Judge of the
Eleventh Judicial Circuit

Judicial Complaint No. 11-25-90101

ORDER

An individual has filed a Complaint against a United States district judge under the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act of 1980, 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–364, and the Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings of the Judicial Conference of the United States.

Background

The record establishes that a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging a defendant with one count each of wire fraud and theft of government property. The indictment alleged that the defendant falsely claimed to have been married to a deceased veteran and repeatedly claimed benefits available to spouses of deceased veterans knowing she was ineligible because she had divorced her spouse. The defendant later pleaded guilty to the wire-fraud charge. The Subject Judge sentenced Complainant to a term of two months of imprisonment.

Complaint

Complainant states he was a “firsthand witness to what I believe were clear instances of judicial misconduct, personal bias, and violations of [the defendant’s] legal rights” during her sentencing hearing. He states, “These actions included the improper disclosure of protected medical information, a demeaning and biased tone from the bench, and discriminatory treatment regarding her [Americans with Disabilities Act]-certified service animal.” Complainant asserts the “overall tone of the hearing was marked by sarcasm, accusation, and a clear absence of judicial impartiality,” and that the Subject Judge “appeared to rely on personal judgment and demeaning assumptions that case [the defendant] in a negative light.”

Complainant states that the Subject Judge publicly discussed details of the defendant’s medical history and protected health information in violation of her right to privacy and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Complainant contends that “especially troubling was the judge’s openly hostile and mocking tone” when she stated, ““This money is for our heroes, not so you can have a smaller nose and bigger breasts.”” He contends the statement was “highly inappropriate, offensive, and unjustified,” trivialized the defendant’s medical procedures, “publicly ridiculed her appearance and implied financial misconduct – without any factual basis,” ignored that the defendant was employed at the time of the procedures, and failed to consider her medical and psychological needs.

Complainant states he observed the Subject Judge issue an “unexplained order” with no rationale requiring the defendant’s service dog to wear a muzzle during the hearing, even though the dog had attended prior court hearings “without incident or complaint.” Complainant states that, in his opinion, “this directive was not based on any legitimate safety concern but was instead used as a tactic of humiliation and control” and a “public assertion of authority over [the defendant], one that disrespected both her dignity and her federally protected rights under the American with Disabilities Act.” Finally, Complainant states, “Taken together, these actions created a hostile courtroom environment that did not reflect the fairness, respect, or due process owed to any defendant – let alone a decorated veteran and public servant like [the defendant]. The judge’s behavior was emotionally harmful, professionally inappropriate, and, in my view, ethically unacceptable.”

Discussion

Judicial-Conduct Rule 4(b)(1) provides in part that “[c]ognizable misconduct does not include an allegation that calls into question the correctness of a judge’s ruling, including a failure to recuse.” The Commentary on Rule 4 explains the rationale for this rule as follows:

Rule 4(b)(1) tracks the Act, 28 U.S.C. § 352(b)(1)(A)(ii), in excluding from the definition of misconduct allegations “[d]irectly related to the merits of a decision or procedural ruling.” This exclusion preserves the independence of judges in the exercise of judicial authority by ensuring that the complaint procedure is

not used to collaterally call into question the substance of a judge's decision or procedural ruling. Any allegation that calls into question the correctness of an official decision or procedural ruling of a judge — without more — is merits-related.

The Complaint fails to present a basis for a finding of misconduct. To the extent Complainant's allegations concern the substance of the Subject Judge's official actions, findings, rulings, and orders in the above-described case, the allegations are directly related to the merits of the Subject Judge's decisions or procedural rulings. Judicial-Conduct Rule 11(c)(1)(B). Complainant's remaining claims are based on allegations lacking sufficient evidence to raise an inference that the Subject Judge acted with an illicit or improper motive, was biased, discriminated against the defendant, treated the defendant in a demonstrably egregious and hostile manner, or otherwise engaged in misconduct. Judicial-Conduct Rule 11(c)(1)(D). For these reasons, this Complaint is **DISMISSED**.

/s/ William H. Pryor Jr.
Chief Judge