

**BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON**

In Re the Matter of

The Honorable Aimee Maurer,
Judge of the Spokane County
District Court

NO. 12403-F-213

**STIPULATION, AGREEMENT
AND ORDER OF ADMONISHMENT**

The Commission on Judicial Conduct (“Commission”) and Spokane County District Court Judge Aimee Maurer (“Respondent”) stipulate and agree as provided herein. This stipulation is submitted pursuant to Article IV, Section 31 of the Washington Constitution and Rule 23 of the Commission’s Rules of Procedure and shall not become effective until approved by the Washington Commission on Judicial Conduct.

I. STIPULATED FACTS

The Commission is represented in these proceedings by its Executive Director, J. Reiko Callner, and Respondent is represented by Attorney Todd Maybrown.

A. Respondent is now and was at all times referred to in this document, a judge of the Spokane County District Court. She has served in that capacity since 2014.

B. On May 6, 2024, the Superintendent of the Mead School District Board of Directors sent a letter to Mead School District students and families through the school district’s email system. The Superintendent’s letter addressed “two assaultive incidents” involving Mead High School football players that occurred during a football camp the preceding summer. The letter discussed the school district’s response to the incidents and sought to assure the recipients that the school district took the incidents seriously and was committed to making changes to avoid similar incidents in the future. The Superintendent’s letter condemned “the behaviors associated with this

incident” and called the players’ actions “a clear violation of district rules and policies related to student conduct [that] have no place in our school community.” The letter also noted that, contrary to some public reports, investigations conducted by the school district and law enforcement did not establish that a sexual assault occurred. The letter concluded with a commitment to ongoing communication “as we continue to clarify our next steps. If you have questions or comments about this issue and our plans going forward, please reach out to [the public information officer].” (The Superintendent’s letter is attached hereto as “Ex. 1.”)

C. Respondent received the Superintendent’s letter as an attachment to an email sent to her county email address and read it shortly after 3 p.m. on May 6, 2024. After concluding her judicial responsibilities that day, Respondent replied to the Superintendent’s letter from her same county email address at approximately 5:30 p.m.¹ In her reply email, Respondent challenged the Superintendent’s claim that the offending students’ actions were not sexual assaults and proceeded to present an assertive legal analysis strongly questioning the Superintendent’s position that it was incorrect to use the term “sexual assault.” Respondent added that “as a parent of a Mead student who is also a young man, I am deeply disturbed by the tone of this email” and questioned why the principal, athletic director and football coach have not been placed on leave. Respondent’s email concluded with her official signature block identifying her as a Spokane County District Court Judge. (Respondent’s responsive email is attached hereto as “Ex. 2.”)

D. After conducting a confidential preliminary investigation, the Commission initiated disciplinary proceedings by serving Respondent with a Statement of Allegations on September 19, 2024. The Statement of Allegations alleged that Respondent may have violated the Code of Judicial Conduct by abusing the prestige of judicial office when she sent the aforementioned email

^{1/} Respondent’s email was sent to the school district’s public information officer with instructions from Respondent to forward it to the Superintendent.

communication from her county email address which included her signature block identifying her as a judge.

E. Respondent timely answered the Statement of Allegations on October 8, 2024. In her answer, Respondent explained that she responded to the Superintendent's message from her county email address because that is where his message was delivered, and that she responded as a concerned parent of a Mead High School student, not as a judicial officer. Respondent further noted that inclusion of her formal judicial title in the signature block was an oversight due to formatting defaults within the email platform.

II. AGREEMENT

A. Respondent's Conduct Violated Canon 1 of the Code of Judicial Conduct

1. Canon 1, Rules 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, of the Code of Judicial Conduct require judges to: (1) uphold the integrity of the judiciary by avoiding impropriety and the appearance of impropriety; (2) act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity and impartiality of the judiciary; and (3) avoid abusing the prestige of judicial office to advance the personal or economic interests of the judge or others.

2. Under these provisions, it is improper for a judge to use or attempt to use his or her judicial status to gain personal advantage or deferential treatment of any kind. While Respondent has explained that she wrote to the Superintendent to express her legitimate concerns as a parent not a judicial officer, the inclusion of her judicial title in her responsive email created an objective appearance of impropriety. A reasonable person would perceive the inclusion of her judicial title in the communication as an effort to lend weight to her position and exert pressure on school officials on how they handled a very nuanced and complex matter. As a judicial officer, it is Respondent's responsibility to be scrupulously attentive to avoid the misuse of the title and tools of judicial office. Here, the Commission accepts that Respondent did not intend to misuse her judicial prestige for an improper non-judicial purpose, but her incautious use of her judicial email

address and title created the appearance that she abused the prestige of judicial office, in violation of Rules 1.1 and 1.2.

B. Imposition of Sanction

1. The sanction imposed by the Commission must be commensurate to the level of Respondent's culpability and must be sufficient to restore and maintain the dignity and honor of the judicial position. The sanction should also seek to protect the public by assuring that Respondent and other judges will refrain from similar acts of misconduct in the future.

2. In determining the appropriate level of discipline to impose, the Commission considers the factors set out in CJCRP 6(c).

a. Characteristics of Respondent's Misconduct. Avoiding abuse of judicial office is a core value of judicial ethics. Misuse of judicial office inevitably undermines public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary and thus the Commission views the nature of this type of misconduct as potentially serious. Because judges wield great power, communication from the official address of a judge has a far more significant impact than communication from others. The facts and circumstances in this matter, however, mitigate most of these concerns. Respondent was deeply concerned about the incidents at her son's school, not only regarding the specific youths involved but for her own son and for other students in the athletic program who could be and had been affected. Because of her concern, she responded quite quickly; within hours of receiving the letter and without much time to reflect. She was not seeking a specific personal benefit but to add the weight of her legal analysis of what had transpired, the effect of the school district's response to date, and how that might affect the student body and other stakeholders. The remaining factors the Commission considers in this section tend to further mitigate the misconduct. The conduct appears to have been isolated to this situation. The conduct occurred outside the courtroom after court hours in a nonjudicial setting and did not, in fact, result in preferential treatment for Respondent.

Respondent maintains that her improper use of her judicial title and email address was unintentional and merely the result of oversight. This is the crux of the judicial ethics issue, however. It is not the content of Respondent's speech in her response that is problematic; it is her unreflecting use of her judicial email and judicial title attached thereto. Judges may make incidental use of work email, particularly where, as here, a parent wishes to receive prompt notification of any urgent issues affecting their child. Having made the choice to receive emails regarding her personal life at her work email address, however, it is the judge's responsibility to be vigilant to the appearance that she created in responding with that judicial email address and signature. The same email from Respondent, if sent from her personal address and without identifying herself as a judge, would likely not raise these concerns.

b. Service and Demeanor of Respondent. Respondent has been a judicial officer for approximately ten years. She has had no prior public disciplinary history. She has cooperated in this proceeding, and by entering into this stipulation, she has further demonstrated her commitment to refrain from similar acts in the future. A significant aspect of the Commission's mission is to provide guidance to other judges, and this stipulation will be helpful toward encouraging other judges to be cautious about the use of their official email. (See, in addition, *In re Lucas*, CJC No. 9137-F-187 (2020).)

C. Based upon the stipulated facts, upon consideration and balancing of the factors set out in CJCRP 6(c), Respondent and the Commission agree that Respondent's stipulated misconduct shall be sanctioned by the imposition of "admonishment." An "admonishment" is a written action of the Commission of an advisory nature that cautions Respondent not to engage in certain proscribed behavior. An admonishment may include a requirement that the respondent follow a specified corrective course of action. Admonishment is the least severe disciplinary action the commission can issue.

D. Respondent agrees that she will not repeat such conduct in the future, mindful of the potential threat any repetition of her conduct poses to public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary and to the administration of justice.


E. Respondent agrees that she will promptly read and familiarize herself with the Code of Judicial Conduct in its entirety and provide written confirmation of that fact within one month of the date this stipulation is accepted.

F. Respondent has been represented in these proceedings by Attorney Todd Maybrown. She affirms that she enters into this agreement sincerely and in good faith, after having had an opportunity to consult with her attorney.

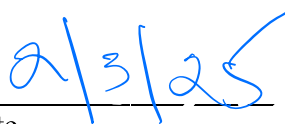
G. Standard Additional Terms and Conditions

1. By entering into this stipulation and agreement, Respondent waives her procedural rights and appeal rights in this proceeding pursuant to the Commission on Judicial Conduct Rules of Procedure and Article IV, Section 31 of the Washington State Constitution.


2. Respondent further agrees that she will not retaliate against any person known or suspected to have cooperated with the Commission or otherwise associated with this matter.



Honorable Anne Vau
Respondent




Date



Todd Maybrown
Attorney for Respondent

February 3, 2025
Date



J. Reiko Callner
Executive Director
Commission on Judicial Conduct

February 4, 2025
Date

ORDER OF ADMONISHMENT

Based upon the above stipulation and agreement, the Commission on Judicial Conduct hereby orders Judge Aimee Maurer ADMONISHED for violating Canon 1, Rules 1.1 and 1.2 of the Code of Judicial Conduct. Respondent shall not engage in such conduct in the future and shall fulfill the terms of the agreement as set forth above.

DATED this 7th day of February, 2025.

Kristian Hedine

Kristian Hedine, Chair
Commission on Judicial Conduct

EXHIBIT 1



Dear Mead families,

Many of you have heard recent reports of serious misconduct involving Mead High School's football program, and we understand that you may have questions. Several members of the team were involved in two assaultive incidents at last summer's football camp. When school administrators became aware of the severity of the incidents, they involved law enforcement and worked with district officials to initiate what became an inordinately long and complex investigation.

This situation naturally raises legitimate concerns about student safety and our responsibility to maintain a safe healthy learning environment. Student safety and well-being is our number one priority. While our core mission is to educate students, students cannot learn unless they feel safe.

Thorough investigations were carried out by both school district officials and law enforcement. The school investigation focused on student and staff behavior within the context of district policy and procedure. Simultaneously, law enforcement completed its investigation and recommended fourth-degree assault charges. Of note is the fact that while the phrase "sexual assault" has been used repeatedly in public reports, those words represent specific criminal acts *not* consistent with the findings of the investigations. What may seem like semantics are, in fact, very important legal distinctions that guided our actions and the decision-making processes in these circumstances.

Acts of intimidation and targeted harassment are absolutely unacceptable and should never have taken place in our programs. The behaviors associated with this incident are a clear violation of district rules and policies related to student conduct and have no place in our school community.

We understand the desire many have expressed for more timely communication and more transparency. That being said, school officials must be cautious to protect the integrity of an investigation process and are bound by legal guidelines and privacy rights afforded to those involved. What school officials can disclose related to misconduct and/or disciplinary processes is always considered within the context of laws that protect student information and guide personnel proceedings. What we can tell you is that the district has taken disciplinary action in relation to both students and staff. We've also initiated and implemented definitive steps to address the issues and provide support, understanding the impact this has had on the students and families involved.

One of the challenges in this situation is that the full scope of what took place at the team camp emerged over a long period of time. With the investigation now complete, a troubling pattern of poor choices and interrelated misbehaviors has emerged, revealing underlying problems in our school culture. Accountability and consequences are necessary and important and, as previously mentioned, the school and district have moved forward in definitive ways. Yet, it is also vitally important that we look at this situation in a way that goes beyond disciplinary action.

What happened in the football program last summer is symptomatic of deeper issues. Yes, we must address hazing, intimidation, and targeted physical harassment, but the investigation also uncovered issues of racial harassment and tension that we cannot and will not ignore. As a learning organization

committed to educating and caring for ALL kids – and *especially* those who are targeted or harassed – we must not shy away from better understanding and addressing all these issues. We will continue our work with a number of trusted professionals who can lead us through what will surely be difficult conversations, ensuring we’re taking real and actionable steps toward creating a culture of dignity and respect.

Together, as a school community (staff, students, parents, community members), we have work to do. Our work goes well beyond a football program, extending to every corner of our school district. We owe it to our students and staff to not only hold those involved accountable, but to create conditions where we can learn and get better together. We are committed to creating a system that ensures our students are safe and protected, and identifies ways we can grow so that every child feels connected, valued, respected, and challenged. We will re-double efforts to make clear our expectations of students and staff, while also seeking genuine and lasting change. We have an opportunity to examine and reflect upon the underlying conditions that contributed to this situation, and we are deeply committed to the hard work of ensuring this does not happen again.

We will be communicating with you more in the coming weeks as we continue to clarify our next steps. If you have questions or comments about this issue and our plans going forward, please reach out to Mead’s Public Information Officer, Todd Zeidler ([REDACTED]), who will direct your questions or concerns to the appropriate person.

For Our Children,

Travis W. Hanson, Superintendent
Mead School District Board of Directors

EXHIBIT 2



Travis Hanson <[REDACTED]>

Fwd: Communications with Mead Parents

Todd Zeidler <[REDACTED]>
To: Travis Hanson <[REDACTED]>

Tue, May 7, 2024 at 8:06 AM

Requested to be forwarded to you.

—
Todd Zeidler
Public Information Officer
Mead School District

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Maurer, Aimee" <[REDACTED]>
Date: May 6, 2024 at 5:28:53 PM PDT
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Communications with Mead Parents

Mr. Zeidler,

I am writing after receiving an email, today, sent to Mead Parents regarding the incident which has been widely and publicly circulated involving a student of the Mead Football program. The letter sent out today by Mr. Hanson is troubling on several fronts. To begin, the tone of the letter suggests that the Mead School District, or more specifically, Mr. Hanson as the Superintendent of the Mead School District Board of Directors is attempting to argue that a "sexual assault" either did not take place, or that the use of that term is incorrect. First of all, regardless of what the involved students were charged with (and according to the news the Prosecutor decided to charge them with 4th Degree Assault) that does NOT mean that the facts alleged did not rise to a "sexual assault." Prosecutors within their discretion are allowed to charge *below* the legally identifiable crime for various reasons. Further, the video depicts and it has been conceded by the Mead School District that a student was forcibly restrained, and had a massage gun placed on his private parts for approximately 11 seconds. I would encourage you to review RCW 9A.44.100, which defines "Indecent Liberties" as "(1) A person is guilty of indecent liberties when he or she knowingly causes another person to have sexual contact with him or her or another: (a) by forceable compulsion; (b) whether the other person is incapable of consent by reason of being... physically helpless." Indecent liberties is a Class A felony. "Sexual Contact" is defined in RCW 9A.44.010(13), as "means any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a person done for the purpose of gratifying sexual desire of either party or a third party." While the intent of those involved is certainly in question, they chose the private parts of their fellow classmates, they could have put the massage gun on many other locations. Thus, the inference is not a positive one. Additionally, under the civil code, RCW 7.105.010 defines "Sexual Abuse" as "means any form of nonconsensual sexual conduct, including, but not limited to, unwanted or *inappropriate touching*, rape, molestation, *indecent liberties*, *sexual coercion*... and *sexual harassment*."

Last, but certainly not least, I would invite you to consider if these allegations were made involving a female student whether the tone of this email would be appropriate. In the MeToo error, it should be crystal clear that it is also the victim's opinion and experience corroborated with evidence as to whether they suffered a sexual assault. As a parent of a Mead Student who is also a young man, I am deeply disturbed by the tone in this email. You concede that it may sound like "semantics" and then proceed to justify exactly that, an argument ground in semantics. The questions you should be asking yourself is not how to make excuses based on semantic definitions (which quite honestly may be legally misleading to ALL the parents in the Mead School District) but why 1) the Principal has not been placed on leave, immediately, 2) why the Athletic Director has not been placed on leave immediately and 3) why the football coach has not been placed on leave immediately. These questions are the ones that lead to protecting students, which even a

cursory review of publicly available information, would suggest that you have grossly failed at doing. This email was disappointing to say the least and the Mead School District and Mr. Hanson, as Superintendent, should be embarrassed and ashamed for sending this out. By the way, "ensuring we're taking real and actionable steps towards creating a culture of dignity and respect...while also seeking genuine and lasting change" starts with being honest, and not misleading parents. Your email was not well received. I would appreciate if you would forward my email response to Mr. Hanson, thank you.

Thank You,

AIMEE N. MAURER

Spokane County District Court Judge



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