

BEFORE THE JUDICIAL QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION

STATE OF GEORGIA

*In re:* Inquiry Concerning  
**Judge Eric W. Norris**

)  
)  
) Complaint No. 2019-277  
)  
)  
)

**Formal Charge**

COMES NOW Charles Boring, Director of the Judicial Qualifications Commission (“JQC”), and presents this Formal Charge against Judge Eric W. Norris of the Superior Court of the Western Judicial Circuit. The JQC Investigative Panel has conducted a Full Investigation of the above-referenced complaint against Judge Norris and has considered the Judge’s responses in writing and in person before the Investigative Panel. Pursuant to JQC Rule 17, the Investigative Panel has concluded that a formal charge should be filed against Judge Norris. Accordingly, the Director files the below Formal Charge with the JQC Hearing Panel pursuant to JQC Rule 19, and respectfully requests that proceedings be instituted for the purpose of determining if Judge Norris committed the acts enumerated below; and if so, the appropriate sanction.

**Facts Applicable to All Counts**

1.

Since April 28, 2016, Judge Norris has served as a Superior Court Judge in Athens-Clarke County, Western Judicial Circuit.

2.

At all times pertinent to these Charges, Judge Norris has served in this judicial capacity.

3.

Judge Norris' chambers are located in the Athens-Clarke County Courthouse at 325 E. Washington St., Room 580, Athens, GA 30601.

**COUNT ONE**

The Director charges that, on or about July 10, 2019, Judge Norris orchestrated a meeting in his chambers with Nathan Owens to discuss a personal Facebook post to a public forum by Mr. Owens that was critical of the court system and Judge Norris. No phones were allowed in the meeting and Judge Norris met with Mr. Owens in his private chambers and used that environment to chastise and berate Mr. Owens about the Facebook post. Judge Norris told Mr. Owens to sit down at one point when Mr. Owens stated he would like an attorney present, and created the impression that Mr. Owens was prohibited from leaving his chambers.

The conduct alleged above in Count One violates Ga. Const. Art. 6, §7, ¶7 (1983), which states that a judge may be removed, suspended, or otherwise disciplined for conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice which brings the judicial office into disrepute.

The conduct alleged above in Count One also violates Canon 1 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires judges to “uphold the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the Judiciary” and “avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety in all of their activities.”

The conduct alleged above in Count One also violates Rule 1.2 (A) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires that judges “act at all times in a manner

that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary.”

The conduct alleged above in Count One also violates Rule 1.3 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires that judges “not lend the prestige of their office to advance the private interests of the judge or others.”

The conduct alleged above in Count One also violates Rule 2.8 (B) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires that judges be “patient, dignified, and courteous to litigants ... and others with whom they deal in their official capacity....”

**NOTICE OF FORMAL CHARGES**

Pursuant to Rules 13, 19, and 20 of the Rules of the Judicial Qualifications Commission, and by filing these Formal Charges with the Hearing Panel, Judge Norris is hereby notified of alleged misconduct and that he is required to file a verified answer to these charges with the Clerk of the Supreme Court and serve a copy of the verified answer on the Director. The answer shall be filed within thirty (30) days after service of these charges. Failure to answer the formal charges shall constitute an admission of the factual allegations.

Respectfully submitted this 12<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2020.

s:\CHARLES P. BORING  
Charles P. Boring, Director  
Judicial Qualifications Commission  
244 Washington Street, Suite 300  
Atlanta, GA 30334

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

Pursuant to Judicial Qualifications Commission Rule 13, the Director certifies that he has this day served the following:

**Formal Charges**

by placing a true and correct copy of the same in the United States mail in an envelope properly addressed with adequate postage thereon to ensure delivery upon the following, and by forwarding via electronic mail to the below address:

Dennis T. Cathey, Esq. (Counsel for Judge Norris)  
Cathey & Strain  
649 Irvin Street  
P.O. Box 689  
Cornelia, Georgia 30531  
[DCathey@catheyandstrain.com](mailto:DCathey@catheyandstrain.com)

This 12<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2020.

s:\CHARLES P. BORING  
Charles P. Boring, Director  
Judicial Qualifications Commission  
244 Washington Street, Suite 300  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
Georgia Bar No. 065131  
cboring@gajqc.com