

**In the
Supreme Court of Indiana**

IN THE MATTER OF)	
)	
THE HONORABLE)	
)	
CHARLES D. BRIDGES)	Cause No: 24S-JD-393
)	
JUDGE OF)	
)	
PUTNAM SUPERIOR COURT)	

**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 Respondent, the Honorable Charles D. Bridges (“Respondent”) of the filing of these 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 Judge of Putnam Superior Court, engaged in judicial misconduct as specifically charged below. Pursuant to 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 May 12, 2006.
2. Since January 1, 2008, Respondent has served as the Judge of Putnam Superior Court.
3. At all times pertinent to these Charges, Respondent presided over a general jurisdiction docket that included criminal and civil cases and served as special judge over *Stout v. Knotts*, cause no. 67C01-2111-PL-000584.

FACTS GIVING RISE TO MISCONDUCT CHARGES

4. On November 11, 2021, Mallory Stout (“Stout”), through counsel, filed a complaint in the Putnam Circuit Court against her former romantic partner, Tanner Knotts (“Knotts”), regarding the proceeds from the sale of a residence that the couple had selected together and cohabitated for nearly two years.
 - a. In the complaint, Stout contended that she was entitled to a portion of the sale proceeds under a theory of implied contract to cohabitate in which Knotts purchased the home for \$69,000 and Stouts contributed to the rehabilitation and maintenance of the home.
 - b. Stout further alleged in the complaint that Knotts was unjustly enriched when he forced her to leave the residence they previously shared, and then subsequently sold it for a substantial gain without compensating Stout for her contributions.
5. On November 11, 2021, Stout also filed a motion for a temporary restraining order to prevent Knotts from spending the money received from the sale of the home before the lawsuit was resolved, which was granted by Putnam Circuit Court on November 12, 2021.

6. On November 30, 2021, Knotts, through counsel, filed a motion for change of judge.
 - a. Knott's motion for change of judge was granted, and the parties selected Respondent as special judge.
 - b. On December 9, 2021, Respondent accepted the appointment as special judge.

Administrative Oversights

7. Throughout the time that Respondent presided over *Stout v. Knotts*, cause no. 67C01-2111-PL-000584, Respondent routinely ruled on motions filed by one party without giving the other party the opportunity to respond or failed to rule on certain motions.
8. On December 10, 2021, Stout filed a motion requesting that all sale proceeds from the home be held by the Putnam County Clerk during the pendency of the lawsuit.
9. On December 12, 2021, Knotts filed a series of pleadings, including a motion to dismiss Stout's complaint, pursuant to Trial Rule of Procedure 12(B)(6), for failure to state a legal cause of action.
10. On December 15, 2021, Respondent granted Knotts' motion to dismiss without providing Stout with an adequate opportunity to respond.
11. On December 21, 2021, Stout filed a motion to correct error and an accompanying memorandum of law. In the accompanying memorandum, Stout argued that Indiana recognizes a cause of action brought under implied contract and unjust enrichment when a former cohabitant-partner seeks damages for contributions made during the period of cohabitation and cited to *Glasgo v. Glasgo*, 410 N.E.2d 1325 (Ind. 1980); *Bright v. Kuehl*, 650 N.E.2d 311 (Ind. Ct. App. 1995); and *Neibert v. Perdomo*, 54 N.E.3d 1046 (Ind. Ct. App. 2016).
12. On December 22, 2021, Respondent granted Stout's motion to correct error without

providing Knotts an opportunity to respond, which vacated the December 15, 2021 order dismissing Stout's complaint.¹

13. As Respondent had not ruled on Stout's December 10 motion to retain the sale proceeds with the Putnam County Clerk, Stout filed a second motion with the same request on January 4, 2022. Respondent granted this motion on the same day.

14. On January 19, 2022, Knotts filed a motion to correct error, asserting that Stout's December 21, 2021 motion to correct error should not have been granted before he had an opportunity to respond within the fifteen (15) day period specified in Trial Rule of Procedure 59(E).

a. Knotts further asserted that Stout did not follow the proper procedure for challenging an order granting a motion to dismiss.

b. Knotts also filed a Motion for Relief of Proceeds to request that the trial court release to him the funds being held by the Clerk from the sale of the home.

15. On January 21, 2022, before Stout could file a response, Respondent granted Knotts' motion to correct error.

16. On January 26, 2022, Stout filed a response to Knotts' motion to correct error and requested that Respondent deny Knotts' Motion for Relief of Proceeds, grant Stout's Motion to Correct Error, and set aside the Order granting Knotts' Motion to Dismiss.

17. Before Knotts could submit a reply, Respondent issued an Order on January 27, 2022 that acknowledged he had granted Knotts' Motion to Correct Error, granted Knotts' fifteen days from January 21, 2022 to file a response to Stout's Motion to Correct Errors,

¹ Trial Rule of Procedure 59 provides, in pertinent part, "Following the filing of a motion to correct error, a party who opposes the motion may file a statement in opposition to the motion to correct error not later than fifteen [15] days after service of the motion."

and denied Knotts' request to release the sale proceeds.

18. Respondent subsequently scheduled a pretrial conference for March 8, 2022.
19. By routinely ruling on motions before allowing the opposing party to respond and not ruling on others, Respondent caused the parties to have to file multiple additional pleadings to preserve their legal positions.

Injudicious Comments During Pretrial Conference

20. On March 8, 2022, Respondent convened an attorneys-only pretrial conference to discuss the procedural posture of the case. Stout's attorney appeared by phone, and Knotts' attorney appeared in person.
21. During the pretrial conference, Respondent made repeated statements about his disfavor of the legal cause of action for implied contract/unjust enrichment between two parties who formerly cohabitated but were not married. Such comments included but were not limited to the following:
 - a. "If these folks aren't married and this woman's trying to get money out of him for a house that she lived in, and I can only -- and I'm just -- I have no idea, I don't know the people, I don't know what the facts of the case, I'm just saying my position is regardless of what everyone else's position is in Indianapolis, that's what the Court of Appeals are for, if she wasn't -- if they weren't married and she lived there and had the benefit of living there and now she wants to claim what everybody calls "sweat equity," bullsh*t, ain't no "sweat equity" in this court."
 - b. "I don't know why I get so many of these but I've had several of them, honestly, and it's -- so far it's always been the woman that moved in with a guy and then when things go south she wants half of his sh*t and they were never married and I don't give it to them."
 - c. "I guess because I've done so many of these cases I see -- I see women that kind of make a habit out of this and I'm -- I'm just -- I'm -- I'm certainly not saying that your client is..., I don't know her, I don't know either one of these people, but I see women do this and it's horsesh*t, to coin a -- to coin a phrase."
 - d. When Stout's counsel asked whether Respondent would uphold a case on the

equitable theory of unjust enrichment or implied contract in a former cohabitation situation, Respondent replied, "I -- I -- I never have. I'm not saying that I won't or haven't, but I -- I -- I just am -- it's not my -- it just doesn't set well with me."

22. Although Respondent also remarked during the pretrial conference that he was "open" for argument, the repeated nature of Respondent's remarks about women and that he disfavored Stout's asserted cause of action gave the appearance that Respondent could not be impartial.

23. At the end of the pretrial conference, Respondent set a trial date for September 22, 2022.

Additional Failure to Rule

24. On March 17, 2022, Stout's attorney filed a motion requesting Respondent's recusal, arguing that Respondent could not be impartial, as evidenced by his remarks during the March 8, 2022 pretrial conference.

25. Respondent never ruled on Stout's Motion for Recusal of Judge.

26. On March 17, 2022, Knotts filed a Motion to Vacate Hearing, contending that when Respondent granted Knotts' motion to correct error on January 21, 2022, it effectively returned the case to the procedural posture when Stout's complaint had been dismissed, so there was no need for a trial setting.

27. On April 8, 2022, Stout filed an objection to Knotts' motion to vacate hearing.

28. On April 9, 2022, Respondent granted Knotts' motion to vacate hearing and dismissed Stout's claim.

29. On April 12, 2022, Knotts filed a motion asking for the release of all sale proceeds held the Putnam County Clerk, which Respondent granted on April 13, 2022.

Court of Appeals Decision in Stout v. Knotts

30. After unsuccessfully moving the trial court to reverse its decision granting Knotts' Motion to Vacate Hearing, Stout filed a Notice of Appeal on May 27, 2022.
31. On July 27, 2023, the Court of Appeals issued its opinion in *Stout v. Knotts*, 22A-PL-1216.
32. The Court of Appeals held that the trial court erred in dismissing Stout's complaint for failure to state a claim, reversed the trial court's order denying Stout's motion to correct error, reversed the trial court's order releasing the funds from the sale of the home to Knotts, and remanded the matter for further proceedings.
33. The Court of Appeals also determined that, on remand, Stout was entitled to a new judge to preside over the proceedings as Respondent "demonstrated his inability to be impartial."
34. In reaching the conclusion that Stout was entitled to a new judge, the Court of Appeals noted that Respondent's statements during the March 8, 2022 pretrial conference went "beyond merely expressing skepticism about Stout's claims in her complaint" and, instead, "clearly expressed disdain, not only for the type of relief that Stout was seeking, but for the gender he believed most often sought this type of relief."
35. The Court of Appeals also noted that recusal was warranted because Respondent indicated that he "would not provide the relief being requested by Stout, regardless of whether the law allowed it or there was sufficient evidence to support the requested relief."

CHARGES

The Commission incorporates the facts set out in ¶¶ 1-36 into the Charges below.

Count 1

The Commission charges that Respondent's statements during the March 8, 2022 pretrial conference and his subsequent rulings after that pretrial conference in *Stout v. Knotts*, cause no. 67C01-2111-PL-000584, violated Rule 2.3(A) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which provides that a judge shall perform the duties of judicial office without bias or prejudice; and Rule 2.3(B) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which provides that a judge shall not, in the performance of judicial duties, by words or conduct manifest bias or prejudice, or engage in harassment, including but not limited to bias, prejudice, or harassment based upon gender.

Count 2

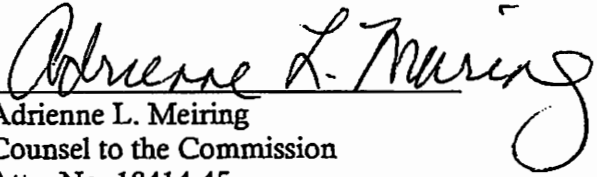
The Commission charges that by ruling on motions before allowing the opposing party to respond by the deadlines established in the Trial Rules of Procedure and by failing to rule on other motions in *Stout v. Knotts*, 67C01-2111-PL-000584, Respondent violated Rule 2.5 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires judges to perform judicial and administrative duties competently, diligently, and promptly.

WHEREFORE, the Commission respectfully requests that, upon the filing of Respondent's Answer, the Indiana Supreme Court appoint three Masters to conduct a public hearing on the charges that Respondent committed judicial misconduct as alleged, and further prays that the Supreme Court find that Respondent committed misconduct and that it impose upon him the appropriate sanction.

DATE

11/18/2024

Respectfully submitted,



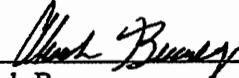
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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that a copy of this "Notice of the Institution of Formal Proceedings and Statement of Charges" was sent by certified mail, postage pre-paid and electronically, to Respondent, through counsel, James H. Voyles, at the following mailing and electronic address:

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11/18/2024
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