

STATE OF TENNESSEE BOARD OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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January 10, 2022

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FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

Judge Ted A. Crozier, Jr.
2 Millennium Plaza, Suite 451
Clarksville, TN 37040

RE: Complaints of Melissa Baker and Sabrina Gear
File Nos. B21-8631 and B21-8662

Dear Judge Crozier:

This letter shall serve as a public reprimand pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated section 17-5-303(e)(2)(B)(i)(c).

On March 19 and 20, 2019, you conducted a bench trial in a termination of parental rights and adoption case, *Elizabeth Ann Baker Grace v. Jonathan Garrett Grace*. More than ten months later on February 5, 2020, you issued your decision. In a letter to Disciplinary Counsel dated October 19, 2021, you indicated that the case was "a fairly easy call" and that the outcome was not "close." You further indicated that you "knew what [your] opinion was going to be at the conclusion of the hearing." The release of your ruling was nonetheless delayed well beyond the time permitted to issue a decision.

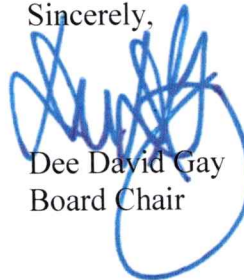
In an unrelated divorce and custody matter in your court, *Sabrina Gear v. Chace Gear*, a party filed a motion seeking permission for an interlocutory appeal along with a "motion for modification of ex parte order of protection." The motions were heard on June 29, 2021. No orders were entered ruling on either motion. On August 3, 2021, the moving party filed a motion asking you to rule on the previously filed motions. No orders were forthcoming. The moving party sent follow-up communications to the clerk's office to no avail. In a letter to Disciplinary Counsel dated December 6, 2021, you explained that you orally denied the motions and requested that an attorney prepare the orders. However, no orders disposing of the motions were filed.

The ethics rules require that judges “perform judicial and administrative duties competently, promptly and diligently.” Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 10, RJC 2.5(A). This directive includes the specific responsibility of promptly disposing of cases. *Id.* at cmt. 5. Specifically, in non-jury cases like the present matters, judges are expected to render a decision and enter a judgment within sixty days of when the case was heard. Tenn. Code Ann. § 20-9-506. A case may not be held under advisement in excess of sixty days “absent the most compelling of reasons.” Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 11, section III(d). Similarly, a motion may not be held under advisement in excess of thirty days “absent the most compelling of reasons.” *Id.* Failing to make timely rulings also implicates Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 10, RJC 1.1 (a judge shall comply with the law) and RJC 1.2 (a judge shall promote confidence in the judiciary). In both cases described above, and in the absence of the most compelling of reasons, you failed to enter orders within the required timeframes.

The investigative panel decided to impose a public reprimand, which you have accepted. In imposing this particular sanction, the panel considered in mitigation that you have taken full responsibility and have offered no excuses. In addition, you have fully cooperated with Disciplinary Counsel and have no prior record of disciplinary action since becoming a judge.

The Board trusts that the public reprimand imposed today will result in an elevated consciousness about how to approach similar situations going forward, as undue delays in resolving cases prevents the parties from moving on from their litigation and undermines public confidence in the proper administration of justice.

Sincerely,



Dee David Gay
Board Chair