



NEW YORK STATE
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Town Justice in Ontario County Should Be Removed for Use of Racial Slur and Appearance of Bias

The New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that Walter W. Jones, a Justice of the Canandaigua Town Court, Ontario County, should be removed from office for repeatedly using the “n-word” in a parking lot after court one day, and for making racially insensitive comments in court five days later.

The Commission found the following:

- In May 2024, after presiding over arraignments, Judge Jones stood in the parking lot of the Ontario County Jail with his court clerk and an Assistant Public Defender, and for approximately eight minutes told a Depression-era story about his father’s work as a youth in Texas cotton fields. In the course of the story, Judge Jones repeatedly quoted his father’s use of the “n-word” in referring to a particular Black man as “[N-word] Harry.”
 - Judge Jones’s story was gratuitous, unrelated to anything that happened in court, and loud enough to cause concern that others in the area might hear. Both the clerk and attorney were upset and reported the incident to their colleagues and superiors.

- Five days later, after arraigning a Black woman with noticeably serious facial injuries who expressed concern about racial bias, Judge Jones said, “Naturally she played the race card,” and suggested that she would have attacked her attorney had she not been restrained.

In its determination the Commission noted that the judge’s use of the racial epithet was “completely inappropriate,” and that, together with his “race card” remarks, his conduct “showed indicia of racial animus and insensitivity combined with an apparent lack of awareness of the impact and impropriety of his statements.”

The Commission rejected various explanations and excuses Judge Jones offered, such as:

- use of the “n” word was necessary for “authenticity and accuracy;”
- he was imparting a “lesson” to his audience;
- he meant to show “that with tolerance, dignity, and respect, we could overcome the differences between us;” and
- the clerk and attorney could have objected to his use of the word.

Among other things, the Commission noted:

It is troubling that respondent appeared not to recognize the impact of his powerful position as a judge and the inappropriateness of using a racial slur when speaking to the court clerk who worked for him and the Assistant Public Defender who regularly represented clients before him. As described above, with judicial authority comes the obligation to act at all times in a manner to uphold the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. Respondent failed to comply with that obligation.

The Commission concluded that the judge “irreparably damaged confidence that he can be and appear to be impartial,” a fundamental requirement for judicial office.

Judge Jones, who is an attorney, has served as a Justice of the Canandaigua Town Court since 1999. His current term expires on December 31, 2027.

Prior Cautions

Jude Jones was previously cautioned twice by the Commission for unrelated conduct. In August 2021, he was cautioned for directing a court clerk to contact a complaining witness in a pending matter about a restitution amount. In March 2024, he was cautioned for failing remit court funds in a timely manner.

Statement by Commission Administrator

Commission Administrator Robert H. Tembeckjian made the following statement:

“The gratuitous use of a racial slur by a judge, repeatedly and with evident zeal, is shocking and disqualifying.”

The Commission Proceedings

Judge Jones was served with a Formal Written Complaint dated April 3, 2025, containing two charges, and filed an Answer dated April 21, 2025.

The Commission designated David M. Garber, Esq., as referee to hear and report proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law. A hearing was held on August 21, 2025, in Rochester, New York. The referee filed a report dated December 4, 2025.

The parties submitted briefs with respect to the referee’s report and the issue of sanctions. Counsel to the Commission argued that the referee’s findings and conclusions of law be confirmed, while Judge Jones argued that they should be confirmed in part and disaffirmed in part. Counsel to the Commission recommended that Judge Jones be removed from office. The judge contended that a private letter of caution, or, at worst, censure, was the appropriate sanction. On January 29, 2026, the Commission heard oral argument.

The Commission Determination

The Commission filed a determination dated March 12, 2026, in which 10 members concurred.¹

Court of Appeals Review

The Commission transmitted its determination to the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, pursuant to Judiciary Law Section 44, subdivision 7. Judge Jones received it on March 21, 2026, and the Commission was subsequently notified by the Court of Appeals that service was complete. Consequently, the matter is now public.

After a removal determination is rendered, it is the Court’s practice to suspend the judge, with pay. A judge has 30 days to request full review of the Commission’s determination by the Court of Appeals. Should the judge request review of the Commission’s removal

¹ Judge David Fried joined the Commission on March 3, 2026, and did not participate in the matter.

determination, the Court's practice is to continue the suspension while the review is pending.

If the judge requests review, the Court sets a schedule for the parties to file briefs and appear for oral argument. On review, the Court may accept or reject the Commission's findings of fact or conclusions of law, may accept the determined sanction, impose a different sanction including admonition or censure, or impose no sanction.

Pursuant to Judiciary Law Section 44, subdivision 7, if Judge Jones does not request review by the Court of Appeals, the Court of Appeals will remove him in accordance with the determination.

Statistics Relating to Prior Determinations

Since 1978, the Commission has issued 186 determinations of removal against judges in New York State. The Commission has issued 360 determinations of censure and 292 determinations of admonition.

The Commission has accepted 163 permanent resignation stipulations, in which the judge has agreed to leave office and never seek or accept judicial office in the future, since the procedure was instituted in 2003.

The Court of Appeals has reviewed 102 Commission determinations. The results are available on the Commission's website at "[Appealed Decisions](#)."

Counsel

Judge Jones was represented by Charles D. Steinman, 217 Fairport Landing, Fairport, New York 14450, (585) 749-3469.

The Commission was represented by Deputy Administrator John J. Postel, Senior Litigation Counsel David Stromes, Senior Attorney Cassie M. Kocher, and Senior Investigator Betsy Sampson.

Background Information on Judge Jones

First Took Office:	1999
Current Term Expires:	December 31, 2027
Year Admitted to NYS Bar:	1973

Members of the Commission

The Commission members serve four-year terms. A list of members is noted below.

The Public File

The determination and other records are available on the Commission's website:
www.cjc.ny.gov.

MEMBERS OF THE STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Member	Appointing Authority	Term End
Joseph W. Belluck, Esq., Chair	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2028
Taa Grays, Esq., Vice Chair	Senate President Pro Tem Andrea Stewart-Cousins	March 31, 2027
Hon. Fernando M. Camacho	Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson	March 31, 2028
Stefano Cambareri, Esq.	Assembly Minority Leader William A. Barclay	March 31, 2029
Brian C. Doyle, Esq.	Senate Minority Leader Robert G. Ort	March 31, 2028
Hon. John A. Falk	Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson	March 31, 2029
Hon. David Fried	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2030
Robin Chappelle Golston	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2029
Nina M. Moore, Ph.D.	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2027
Hon. Peter H. Moulton	Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson	March 31, 2030
Marvin Ray Raskin, Esq.	Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie	March 31, 2030