

**IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
MAHONING COUNTY, OHIO**

RONALD WINPHRIE



Plaintiff

vs.

MICHAEL CICCONE, individually, and
as Mahoning County Clerk of Court

-and-

MAHONING COUNTY CLERK OF
COURTS

120 Market Street

Youngstown, OH 44503

Defendants.

) CASE NO.

) JUDGE:

) **COMPLAINT**

) (Jury Demanded)

) **Instructions for Service**

Plaintiff, Ronald Winphrie, states as follows for his Complaint against Defendants:

PARTIES

1. Plaintiff, Ronald Winphrie, is an individual residing in Youngstown, Mahoning County, Ohio.

2. Defendant, Michael Ciccone, is sued individually and in his official capacity as the Mahoning County Clerk of Court. As Clerk of Court, Ciccone maintains his principal office in Mahoning County, Ohio.

3. At all times relevant to this complaint, Defendant Mahoning County Clerk of Courts employed Winphrie as a supervisor of the title department for the Clerk of Courts.

4. Mahoning County Clerk of Courts employed fifteen or more employees for each working day in each of twenty or more calendar weeks in the current or preceding calendar year, making Defendant an "employer" within the meaning of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

5. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Article IV, Section 4(B) of the Ohio Constitution and Ohio Revised Code Section 2305.01, which grants the Court of Common Pleas original jurisdiction in all civil cases within its territorial jurisdiction.

6. This Court has supplemental jurisdiction over Winphrie's federal claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367, as those claims arise from the same case or controversy as Winphrie's state law claims.

7. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts because each resides in and conducts business in Mahoning County, Ohio, and the acts and omissions giving rise to this action occurred in Mahoning County, Ohio.

8. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to Ohio Civil Rule 3(C), as this is the county in which Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts reside, conduct business, and where the acts giving rise to Winphrie's claims occurred.

9. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over Winphrie's Title VII claims pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(f)(3), which grants state courts concurrent jurisdiction with federal district courts over claims arising under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

10. Winphrie has exhausted all administrative remedies required under Title VII by timely filing a charge on February 16, 2026 with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, charge no. 532-2026-02045, and the charge was dual filed with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. On August 31, 2026, the EEOC issued Winphrie a Notice of Right to Sue for his federal and state claims.

11. This action is filed within ninety days of Winphrie's receipt of the Notice of Right to Sue.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

12. At all times relevant to this Complaint, Ciccone served as the elected Clerk of Court for Mahoning County, Ohio.

13. As Clerk of Court, Ciccone is responsible for ministerial duties such as filing, maintaining, and safeguarding court records, issuing writs and process, administering oaths, recording court proceedings, maintaining a title database, issuing motor vehicle titles, and

carrying out additional tasks as prescribed by statute or the court, while acting under the court's direction and without exercising judicial discretion.

14. Winphrie is an African American male who had substantial experience working in the court system, as he was previously employed at Youngstown Municipal Court as a deputy service bailiff.

15. Ciccone offered Winphrie employment at the Clerk's office as Supervisor and Winphrie accepted that position and worked for Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts from approximately June 30, 2025 to September 10, 2025.

16. In reliance upon Ciccone's offer of employment, Winphrie resigned from his position with the Youngstown Municipal Court.

17. Throughout Winphrie's employment with Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts, Winphrie performed his job duties satisfactorily and met or exceeded performance expectations.

18. Ciccone promised that he would take Winphrie to work-related conferences.

19. Shortly after being employed by Ciccone, Winphrie began experiencing disparate and negative treatment from Ciccone. This negative, disparate treatment included, but was not limited to, hiring Meghan Hanni, a white female as Winphrie's "co-supervisor." The title supervisor had never had a co-supervisor. Ciccone required Winphrie to perform clerical duties instead of his supervisor duties. The title supervisor had never been required to perform clerical duties.

20. Ciccone favored the white co-supervisor of the title department.

21. On September 10, 2026, Ciccone terminated Winphrie's employment. The termination letter provided no reason or explanation for Winphrie's termination.

22. In October 2025, a series of text messages between Ciccone and his former deputy clerk, Jennifer Ciccone, were leaked.

23. In the text message exchanges, Ciccone told Jennifer Ciccone that he was planning to terminate Winphrie. Ciccone, when referring to Winphrie and Winphrie's upcoming termination, sent a message to Jennifer Ciccone that stated, "I think George would have been a better n [REDACTED] but I f [REDACTED] up and trusted Thais. And shes [sic] next to go."

24. In the same text message exchange, Ciccone also referred to another black employee, Thais Scott, and stated his intention to terminate Ms. Scott as well.

25. Throughout Winphrie's tenure in the Mahoning County Clerk of Court's office, he satisfactorily performed his job duties, exceeded expectations, and without adequate training or oversight, discharged his administrative responsibilities.

26. Winphrie's termination was racially motivated and without just cause and was made in bad faith.

27. At all times material to this Complaint, Ciccone acted under color of state law in his capacity as Mahoning County Clerk of Courts.

COUNT I - VIOLATION OF TITLE VII OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

(RACIAL DISCRIMINATION)

28. Winphrie realleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 28.

29. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2, prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of race.

30. Mahoning County Clerk of Courts is an employer within the meaning of 42 U.S.C. § 2000e(b).

31. Winphrie was an employee of the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts within the

meaning of Title VII.

32. Winphrie is a member of a protected class, specifically African American

33. Winphrie was qualified for his position as supervisor and performed his duties in a satisfactory manner.

34. Despite his qualifications and satisfactory performance, Winphrie was subjected to an adverse employment action when he was terminated on September 10, 2025.

35. Ciccone's text message, in which he used a racial slur to refer to Winphrie and stated that he should have chosen a "better n [REDACTED]" demonstrates that Winphrie's race was a motivating factor in the decision to terminate his employment. The text message constitutes direct evidence of racial discrimination.

36. Ciccone's reference to his intent to terminate another African American employee demonstrates a pattern of race-based employment decisions.

37. As a direct and proximate result of Ciccone's and the Mahoning County Clerk of Court's unlawful discrimination, Winphrie has suffered damages including lost wages, lost benefits, emotional distress, and damage to his professional reputation.

**COUNT II - VIOLATION OF 42 U.S.C. § 1983 (EQUAL PROTECTION CLAUSE,
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION)**

38. Winphrie realleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 37.

39. At all times relevant to this Complaint, Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts acted under color of state law.

40. Winphrie has a constitutional right under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to be free from discrimination on the basis of race in public employment.

41. Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts violated Winphrie's right to equal protection by discriminating against him on the basis of his race.

42. Ciccone's use of a racial slur to refer to Winphrie demonstrates intentional discrimination on the basis of race.

43. Ciccone's and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts's termination of Winphrie's employment was motivated by racial animus, as evidenced by Ciccone's text message and the pattern of adverse treatment toward African American employees.

44. Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts treated Winphrie differently than similarly situated employees who were not African American.

45. As a direct and proximate result of Ciccone's and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts's violation of Winphrie's constitutional rights, Winphrie has suffered damages including lost wages, lost benefits, emotional distress, and damage to his professional reputation.

**COUNT III - VIOLATION OF OHIO REVISED CODE § 4112.02 (RACIAL
DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT)**

46. Winphrie realleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 45.

47. Ohio Revised Code § 4112.02 prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of race.

48. Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts are employers within the meaning of Ohio's anti-discrimination statutes.

49. Winphrie is African American and is a member of a protected class under Ohio law.

50. Winphrie was qualified for his position and performed his duties satisfactorily.

51. Despite his qualifications and performance, Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts discriminated against Winphrie on the basis of his race.

52. Ciccone's use of a racial slur to refer to Winphrie demonstrates intentional discrimination on the basis of race.

53. Ciccone's and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts's discriminatory conduct was willful, wanton, and malicious.

54. As a direct and proximate result of Ciccone's and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts's unlawful discrimination, Winphrie has suffered damages including lost wages, lost benefits, emotional distress, humiliation, and damage to his professional reputation.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Winphrie respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment in his favor against Ciccone and the Mahoning County Clerk of Courts and award the following relief:

A. Compensatory damages in an amount to be determined at trial, including:

- Back pay from the date of termination through the date of judgment;
- Front pay;
- Lost benefits; Emotional distress damages;
- Damage to professional reputation.

B. Punitive damages pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1981 in an amount to be determined at trial;

C. Compensatory damages for emotional distress, humiliation, and mental

anguish pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1981a.

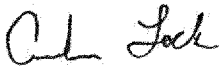
D. Pre-judgment and post-judgment interest as provided by law;

- Reasonable attorney's fees and costs of suit as provided by 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(g) and Ohio Revised Code § 4112.052.

E. Such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

Respectfully submitted,

GREEN HAINES SGAMBATI CO., L.P.A.



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JURY DEMAND

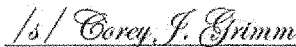
Plaintiff demands a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

Respectfully submitted,

GREEN HAINES SGAMBATI CO., L.P.A.



CHARLES W. OLDFIELD (0071656)
ANDREW S. LOCK (0100622)



COREY J. GRIMM (#0089473)
INGRAM, GRIMM & YACOVONE, LLP

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SERVICE

TO THE CLERK:

Please serve the Defendant, Michael Ciccone, individually and as Mahoning County Clerk of Courts via certified mail return receipt requested at 120 Market Street, Youngstown, OH 44503.

Respectfully submitted,

GREEN HAINES SGAMBATI CO., L.P.A.



CHARLES W. OLDFIELD (0071656)
ANDREW S. LOCK (0100622)



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