

BEFORE THE JUDICIAL QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION  
STATE OF FLORIDA

INQUIRY CONCERNING A JUDGE, :  
NO. 99-325, SHELDON SCHAPIRO : CASE NO. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ :

**NOTICE OF FORMAL CHARGES**

TO: Honorable Sheldon M. Schapiro  
Broward County Courthouse  
201 S.E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

You are hereby notified that the Investigative Panel of the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission, by a vote of those members present at its meeting held in Orlando, Florida on March 9, 2001, has determined pursuant to Rule 6(f) of the Rules of the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission, as revised, and Article V, § 12(b) of the Constitution of the State of Florida, that probable cause exists for formal proceedings to be, and the same are hereby, instituted against you to inquire into charges based upon allegations that you have continuously engaged in a pattern of demeaning, abusive, and intemperate behavior toward counsel, and witnesses appearing before you, *to wit*:

1. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), in approximately 1996, you chastised an attorney, Joseph Dawson, for allegedly speaking in your courtroom by stating, "Why do I always have to treat you like a school child?" or words to that effect. When Mr. Dawson responded that you routinely treat everyone in your courtroom like a school child, you ordered him out of the courtroom. Since that time, Mr. Dawson has routinely sought your recusal and you have granted those requests.

2. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), in May, 1998, you ordered Denise Neuner, an assistant state attorney, to appear before you and try a criminal case although Ms. Neuner had previously contacted your chambers to explain she had a severe medical condition and had been ordered by her physician to bed rest because of the possibility she might have pneumonia.

3. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), in approximately March or April 1998, you attempted to force Greg Rossman, an assistant state attorney, to try a case that was assigned to another assistant state attorney. When Mr. Rossman responded that the practice of the State Attorney's Office was for each assistant to try only his or her own cases, you proceeded to scream at Mr. Rossman and tell him that the case in question was a "nothing case," which he should be prepared to try with no advance preparation. You further admonished Mr. Rossman by making the following sarcastic remarks:

THE COURT: All right, you want to waste my time, there will come a time I warn you, when I'm going to be tied up in something and you will have a speedy pending and my time will not be available. You are squandering the Court's time.

4. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), you have routinely berated and unnecessarily embarrassed attorneys for allegedly talking in your courtroom when those attorneys were either not talking at all or speaking in appropriately low tones of voice concerning legitimate business of the court (e.g. state attorneys and defense

counsel conferring with one another concerning plea negotiations), as evidenced by the following examples:

a. You chastised and unnecessarily raised your voice at Ginger Miranda, an assistant public defender, as she attempted to confer with her client who was a prisoner in custody. Specifically, you said to Ms. Miranda, "Psst. Hey you. I'm sick and tired of the noise you make in my courtroom" or words to that effect. When Ms. Miranda explained that she was trying to discuss a plea offer with her client, you continued to berate her. Ms. Miranda then apologized to which you sarcastically replied, "Oh yeah, you're sorry," or words to that effect.

b. In approximately September, 2000, as Deborah Carpenter, an assistant public defender, was waiting in open court for her case to be called, another public defender began speaking with her. You then said, "Ms. Carpenter, if you say one more word, I'm going to have you removed from the courtroom" or words to that effect. When the other assistant public defender interceded and stated, "Judge, I'm sorry, it was me," you ignored her statement and responded, "I don't want to hear another word out of you Ms. Carpenter" or words to that effect.

c. On another occasion, you ordered Bradley Weissman, an assistant state attorney, to leave the courtroom because you believed he was talking, although Mr. Weissman was not talking.

d. In a similar episode, during the summer of 1999, you had previously ordered everyone in the courtroom to be quiet. Dennis Siegel, an assistant state attorney, was among the attorneys in the courtroom at the time. You then turned to Mr. Siegel and said, "Mr. Siegel, I told you to be quiet" or words to that effect. Mr. Siegel responded that he had not been talking. Despite his denial, you continued to insist that you saw Mr. Siegel talking.

5. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), in a criminal case over which you presided, as Maria Schneider, an assistant state attorney, was trying to address the court, you yelled at her and responded, "Be quiet. Don't say another word in court. If you open your mouth again, you will be sitting there," or words to that effect, as you pointed to the area where prisoners sit during court proceedings.

6. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), several years ago, as a criminal defense attorney was making an argument in a sexual battery case, you cut him off and said, "Do you know what I think of your argument?" or words to that effect, at which time you pushed a button on a device that simulated the sound of a commode flushing.

7. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), in a case involving a defendant driving with a suspended driver's license approximately four years ago, Louis Pironti, an assistant public defender at the time, advised you during a sidebar conference that he might need a continuance in order to secure an expert witness. The sidebar was held in a small room behind the bench commonly known as the woodshed among attorneys familiar with your courtroom (hereinafter "backroom"). Instead of simply denying the motion, you became agitated and responded by saying to Mr. Pironti, "You're going to try this mother fu\_\_ing case." You then returned to the bench and threw the docket down on a desk.

8. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, Canon 3B(4), and Canon 3B(5), approximately 4 ½ years ago, as Shari Tate, a female assistant state attorney, was

arguing a motion to revoke bond, you summoned Ms. Tate to the backroom behind your bench and told her that she needed to emulate the style of male attorneys when addressing the court because male attorneys did not get as emotional about their cases as the female attorneys did. As a result of this experience, Ms. Tate advised you that she would never go to the backroom with you again without a court reporter being present.

9. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), in another incident involving Ms. Tate when she was eight months pregnant, she was hospitalized because of pregnancy complications on the third day of a trial over which you presided. As a result of her hospitalization, Ms. Tate requested a continuance of the trial. You denied the continuance and further advised Ms. Tate that she should get another prosecutor from her office to complete the trial. When Ms. Tate advised your chambers that “substituting” counsel was not feasible in that no other assistant state attorney was familiar enough with the case to step in her place, you, or your chambers, advised Ms. Tate that if she were not in court the following morning, you would dismiss the case. As a result, Ms. Tate left the hospital against her doctor’s orders in order to complete the trial before you.

10. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), in 1999, you presided over a bond hearing where a motorcyclist had killed a child and left the scene. The child’s mother and neighbor came to the bond hearing, which was approximately two days after the incident and before the child was buried. After you made a preliminary

determination that the defendant was entitled to bond, the assistant state attorney advised you that the mother of the victim was present and wanted to address the court. You responded by saying, "What do I need to hear from the mother of a dead kid for? All she will tell me is to keep the guy in custody and never let him out" or words to that effect. The victim's mother heard your sarcastic remarks and was then afraid to address the court.

11. In violation of Canon 1, Canon 2A, and Canon 3B(4), you have fallen into a general pattern of rude and intemperate behavior by needlessly interjecting yourself into counsel's examinations of witnesses; embarrassing and belittling counsel in court; and questioning the competence of counsel by making remarks such as, "What, are you stupid?"

### **CONCLUSION**

12. The acts described above, if they occurred as alleged, would also impair the confidence of the citizens of this state in the integrity of the judicial system and in you as a judge; would constitute a violation of the cited Canons of the Code of Judicial Conduct; would constitute conduct unbecoming a member of the judiciary; would demonstrate your unfitness to hold the office of judge; and would warrant discipline, including but not limited to your removal from office and/or any lawyer discipline recommended by the Commission.

You are hereby notified of your right to file a written answer to the above charges made against you within twenty (20) days of service of this notice upon you.

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and

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing **NOTICE OF FORMAL CHARGES** has been furnished by **Certified Mail** to the **HONORABLE SHELDON M. SCHAPIRO**, Broward County Courthouse, 201 S.E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301 on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of November, 2001.

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Attorney