

JUDICIAL BRANCH CERTIFICATION COMMISSION MINUTES OF THE MEETING

First Floor Conference Room
Tom C. Clark Building
205 W. 14th Street
Austin, Texas 78701
Friday, May 2, 2025
(10:00 a.m. Until Adjournment)

The meeting of the Judicial Branch Certification Commission (Commission) was called to order by Judge Sid Harle, Chair, at 10:00 a.m., Friday, May 2, 2025. Members in attendance were Judge Sid Harle; Judge William Sowder; Judge Victor Villarreal; Judge Glen Harrison; Judge David Jahn; Velma Arellano; Don Ford; Mark Blenden; and Ann Murray Moore.

Staff members in attendance were Ron Morgan, Commission Director; Scott Gibson, Commission General Counsel; Veena Mohan, Prosecuting Attorney; Sheryl Jones, Deputy Director; Melinda Saucedo, Compliance Manager; Amy Smith, Investigator; Tyees Holcombe, Judicial Regulatory Assistant; and Kanisha Daniels, Legal Assistant.

Complaint review committee member in attendance were Carol Watson, Process Servers Complaint Review Committee; Kelly Hanna, Court Reporters Complaint Review Committee; and Shari Krieger, Court Reporters Complaint Review Committee.

Agenda Item III. Opening Remarks

Judge Harle thanked everyone for their attendance. He noted the departure of Judge Polly Spencer and her long service on the Commission. He also welcomed Judge David Jahn, a new Commissioner.

The Commission Director welcomed Martha Newton, Supreme Court of Texas General Counsel.

The Commission Director thanked the Commission for the work they do and their attention to the issues put before them and thanked staff for their hard work.

The Commission Director stated in his remarks that there are 147 pending investigations, an increase from last quarter. Of the pending investigations the Commission will address over 20 at the meeting. The high number of pending investigations reflects that the volume of complaints has increased substantially. Last month staff received 22 complaints, 8 of which were filed one week before the meeting. Complaints received between January and April 2025 are up 80% compared to the same timeframe in 2024. The majority of the complaints filed have been against process servers. There has also been an increase in complaints filed against court reporters. Presently there are over 7,200 licensees across the professions with the following breakdown: over 2,300 court reporters; 253 court reporting firms; 450 private professional guardians; over 3,800 process servers; 34 guardianship programs; and 484 court interpreters. The Commission received 122 applications and has issued a total of 154 new licenses, certifications, and registrations in April 2025. Over 1,200 applications are pending approval, most of which are for court reporters.

Agenda Item IV. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

- A. Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Ann Murray Moore, the Commission voted to unanimously approve the February 7, 2025 minutes.
- B. Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Ann Murray Moore, the Commission voted to unanimously approve the March 13, 2025 Special Commission meeting minutes.

The Prosecuting Attorney presented agenda items V, VI, VII and VIII.

Agenda Item V. Compliance Hearings Before the Commission

Court Reporters Certification

- A. In the Matter of Cheryl Dixon. Cause No. 0777
The Chair notified the Commissioners that this case will be heard at the next Commission meeting on August 1, 2025.
- B. In the Matter of LaToya Young, Cause Nos. 0714 and 0796
Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Don Ford, the Commission voted to refuse to reissue or approve the respondent's court reporter certification for a period of 2 consecutive years after the date of the Final Order. If the Respondent applies for a court reporter certification following the expiration of this 2-year period, she must first successfully complete a course on time-management and organization approved by the Commission's Director and appear before the Commission to show good cause why she should be reissued a court reporter certification including, but not limited to, good faith efforts to address the underlying reasons for the foregoing violations. She is further required to perform all prerequisites for initial certification per the rules of the Commission including, but not limited to, passing an examination for court reporter certification.

Agenda Item VI. Agreed Final Orders- Acceptance by Respondents of Penalty and Sanction

Process Servers Certification

- A. In the Matter of Byron McDuffie, Cause No. 0642
Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Judge Sowder, the Commission voted unanimously to issue a reprimand to the respondent.
Mark Blendon recused.
- B. In the Matter of Denise Biggs, Cause Nos. 0627 and 0670
Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Judge Sowder, the Commission voted unanimously to permanently revoke the respondent's process server certification effective the date of the Final Order and assess against her an administrative penalty of \$1,250 total due within 12 months of the Final Order.

Court Reporters Certification

- A. In the Matter of Janet Wright, Cause No. 0653
Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Judge Sowder, the Commission voted unanimously to reprimand the respondent and assess against her an administrative penalty of \$1,200 total due within 12 months of the date of the Final Order.

B. In the Matter of Micah Gentry, Cause No. 0682

Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Judge Sowder, the Commission voted unanimously to place the respondent on a 6-month probated suspension effective the date of the Final Order and assess against him a \$1,450 administrative penalty due within 12 months after date of Final Order.

Judge Harle recused.

Agenda Item VII. Approval Settlement Agreements

Process Severs Certification

A. In the Matter of Taiwo Osibanjo, Cause No. 0612

Upon proper motion by Ann Murray Moore and second by Judge Sowder, the Commission voted unanimously to adopt the settlement agreement and permanently refuse to renew or approve the respondent's process server certification effective the date of the Final Order and assess against her an administrative penalty of \$1,250 total due within 12 months after the date of the Final Order.

B. In the Matter of Reginald Morgan, Cause No. 0624

Upon proper motion by Ann Murray Moore and second by Judge Sowder, the Commission voted unanimously to adopt the settlement agreement and assess an administrative penalty against the respondent of \$50 due no later than 6 months after the date of the Final Order.

C. In the Matter of Eduardo Aguirre, Cause No. 0631

Upon proper motion by Ann Murray and second by Judge Sowder, the Commission adopted, by a vote of 7-1 (Mark Blendon opposed) the settlement agreement and place the respondent on a 3-month suspension effective the date of the Final Order.

Agenda Item VIII. Administrative Dismissal of Complaints

Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second Judge Sowder, the Commission ratified the administrative dismissal of the following complaints by unanimous vote.

Guardianship Certification

No Misconduct:

A. In the Matter of Cause No. 0783

Outside the Jurisdiction of the Commission:

B. In the Matter of Cause No. 0699

C. In the Matter of Cause No. 0722

Process Servers Certification

Outside the Jurisdiction of the Commission:

D. In the Matter of Cause No. 0761

E. In the Matter of Cause No. 0711

No Misconduct:

F. In the Matter of Cause No. 0768

G. In the Matter of Cause No. 0797

Court Reporters Certification

No Misconduct:

- H. In the Matter of Cause No. 0745
- I. In the Matter of Cause No. 0780
- J. In the Matter of Cause No. 0789

No Misconduct and Outside the Jurisdiction of the Commission:

- K. In the Matter of Cause No. 0778
- L. In the Matter of Cause No. 0787

Outside the Jurisdiction of the Commission:

- M. In the Matter of Cause No. 0755

Professions Not Regulated by the Commission

Outside the Jurisdiction of the Commission:

- N. In the Matter of Cause No. 0786
- O. In the Matter of Cause No. 0814

Agenda Item IX. Request for Reconsideration of Administrative Dismissal of Complaints

- A. In the Matter of Cause No. 0712

For want of a motion to reconsider, the Commission's previous decision to ratify the administrative dismissal remains in effect.

Agenda Item X. Administrative Matters Relating to the Commission

- A. Presentation by the Commission Director on Commission Backup Contents Policy

The Commission Director provided the commission members with a list of documents that will be provided at future meetings for each agenda item. The intent of this list is to standardize the contents of the commission backup and adhere to best practices, in order to balance fairness with efficiency in the disciplinary process.

- B. Presentation by Director on Commission Short-Range Planning

The Director of the Commission visited with stakeholders and various associations to identify top priorities to work on over the next year. At the top of the list is staff support and engagement, in order to create a workplace with committed employees and ensure both management and staff have a voice on final decisions. The Director discussed priorities that have been identified to build a prepared workforce of court professionals that supports the desired outcomes of the Judicial Council and the Judicial Council's legislative priorities. This includes items such as accepting national certifications as an alternative to Texas state exams; regulating digital court reporters and recorders; and increasing court interpreter training, continuing education, and pre-testing orientation. Lastly, the Director discussed leveraging the expertise of the Commission and its Advisory Boards for initiatives and streamlining meeting processes.

The Director stated that the number of pending investigations was greater than the manpower available. He explained that there are restrictions on the funding created through licensing revenue that prevent the Office of Court Administration from creating another investigator position. As a consequence, the Director worked with the Human Resources/Finance Department to convert the Legal Assistant position to an Investigator position.

The Director identified technological options to streamline operations and enhance efficiencies, which include: (1) investigating virtual testing for written exams by utilizing private testing centers; (2) modifying ALiS (online certification and licensing system), an online

certification and licensing system, to streamline investigation processes; (3) enhancing the processing of guardianship registration applications; and (4) identifying any non-essential elements of application processes or elements that can be eliminated or expedited by technology.

The Director discussed ways to improve the quality of test-takers for the licensed court interpreter exam. Commission staff will meet with the Licensed Court Interpreters Advisory Board to discuss options to enhance pre-testing preparation and solicit their recommendations and staff's recommendations on pre-testing requirements.

The Director discussed ways to increase the number of court reporters certified in Texas. Commission staff will work with the associations to identify barriers to entry and rule enhancements that could increase the number of qualified reporters. Staff will also work with Texas Center for the Judiciary to inform judges that voice-writers (oral stenographers) are certified and capable to serve as official court reporters.

The Director discussed ways to improve the processing of applications by improving public information regarding the application process and addressing issues that affect the timeframe for processing an application

The Commission is working to improve public-facing communications by updating the website to enhance clarity and identify/create educational materials that can be posted to the website.

C. Proposed Revision to Commission Rules to Align Licensed Court Interpreter Oral Exam Fees with Actual Exam Costs

Upon proper motion by Don Ford and second by Velma Arellano the Commission voted unanimously to ask the court to authorize increasing the cap for oral exam fees not to exceed \$750.

D. Recommendation to the Texas Supreme Court for Appointments/ Re-appointments to the Court Reporter Advisory Board

Upon proper motion by Velma Arellano and second by Ann Murray Moore, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend proposed appointments of Molly Pela, Kelly Hanna, and Whitney Alden-Riley to the Texas Supreme Court.

E. The next commission meeting is set for Friday, August 1, 2025.

Agenda Item XI. Public Comment

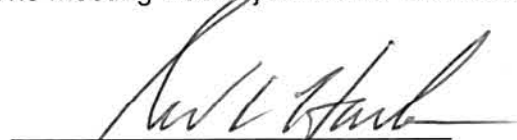
There were no public comments.

Agenda Item XII. Closing Remarks

Judge Harle thanked everyone for being present.

Agenda Item XIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:52 am.


Judge Sid Harle, Chair

August 1, 2025
Date