

State of Arizona
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Disposition of Complaint 18-119

Judge: Steve Urie

Complainant: Commission on Judicial Conduct

ORDER

The commission initiated an investigation into a Facebook posting by a justice of the peace that implicated Rules 1.2 and 2.10 of the Code.

Judge Steve Urie posted an exchange on his Facebook page that purported to be a verbatim account of his conversation with a litigant in his court on an eviction proceeding. Instead of specific names, Judge Urie referred to the individuals by their role in the case – “landlord,” “tenant,” etc. The case involved drugs being found in the tenant’s apartment, and the tenant making incriminating statements. When one of Judge Urie’s friends questioned if this was a true story, Judge Urie replied, “Yes. It goes without saying but the tenant wasn’t the brightest bulb in the chandelier.”

The commission did not find a violation of Rule 2.10, as the underlying matter had been concluded, so this was not a comment on a pending or impending matter. However, the commission did find that the posting itself, as well as Judge Urie’s reply, violated Rule 1.2. Rule 1.2 states “A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary, and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.” The posting and reply mocked the intelligence level of the tenant. This is an appearance of impropriety and diminishes public confidence in the judiciary.

Accordingly, Judge Steve Urie is hereby publicly reprimanded for his conduct as described above and pursuant to Commission Rule 17(a). In his response to the commission, Judge Urie noted that he had removed his reply comment from the posting, however, the Commission directs that Judge Urie remove the entire post from his Facebook page. Additionally, the commission directs Judge Urie to review Judicial Ethics Advisory Opinion 14-01¹ so he can ensure all future social media

¹

http://www.azcourts.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zNRP1_18sck%3d&portalid=137

postings comply with the Code and that opinion. The record in this case, consisting of the complaint, the judge's response, and this order shall be made public as required by Rule 9(a).

Commission members Chris Ames, George H. Foster, Jr. and Anna Mary Glaab did not participate in the consideration of this matter.

Dated: June 12, 2018

FOR THE COMMISSION

/s/ Louis Frank Dominguez

Hon. Louis Frank Dominguez
Commission Chair

Copies of this order were distributed to all appropriate persons on June 12, 2018.

This order may not be used as a basis for disqualification of a judge.

 Steve Urie
23 hrs · 

In the category of, "You can't make this stuff up!" A landlord came before me asking for an immediate eviction of his tenant because his tenant was using illicit drugs in the landlord's apartment. For brevity and clarity, I write in the third person.

Judge: "Mister Landlord what are the allegations against the tenant?"

Landlord: "The tenant has been using illegal drugs in my rental property in violation of the law and I want him out immediately!"

Judge: Do you have an witness who can testify as to this alleged illegal activity?

Landlord: Yes, your honor, my maintenance man witnessed the event.

Maintenance Man: I went to the tenant's apartment to fix a leaky sink. My assistant and I went into the guest bathroom and removed the throw rug from in front of the sink. Under the rug, there was a clear plastic bag about 1 inch by 1 inch with a white powder in it. We called the police who came and tested the white powder. It tested positive for heroine.

Judge: Mister Tenant would you like to respond to the maintenance man's testimony?

Tenant: Yes, I would. Heroine is not my drug of choice. I would never use heroine. Cocaine is my drug of choice and I keep all my cocaine and drugs in a safe in my room in the closet.

Landlord: Well, how did the heroine get into your apartment?

Tenant: I don't know. Maybe one of the hookers I had in my apartment left it.

Needless to say, the Court ruled in favor of the landlord.

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 and 46 others

2 Shares

 True story in your court? 1

Like · Reply · 23h

 Steve Urie Yes! It goes without saying but the tenant wasn't the brightest bulb in the chandelier.

Like · Reply · 22h

 Steve Urie just seemed a little far fetched... I mean seriously Mr. tenant???

Like · Reply · 21h

May 21, 2018

April P. Elliott
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Re: Notice of Complaint and Opportunity to Respond (Case No. 18-119)

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am in receipt of the Commission's letter of complaint regarding a posting on my Facebook page implicating possible violations of Rule 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary) and Rule 2.10 (Judicial Statement on Pending and Impending Cases). I will address the implications regarding Rule 2.10 first and then the violations of Rule 1.2.

Regarding Rule 2.10, this case was an "Immediate Eviction/Special Detainer" that was adjudicated prior to June 1, 2017. The case was not appealed. There are no pending or impending litigation, rulings or appeals.

Regarding Rule 1.2, the testimony of the maintenance personnel and the defendant are as they were given at trial. There was no embellishment or exaggeration of the testimony as presented on my Facebook page. However, I think the Complaint is alleging as a violation of Rule 1.2 is my reply to when I responded with "... the tenant wasn't the brightest bulb in the chandelier." Upon reviewing my reply, I can understand how the statement could be considered mocking the Defendant, and thus, not promoting public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary. I have deleted the reply from my Facebook Page.

I deeply regret having posted the reply. It was insensitive and condescending of the litigant by me. In the future, I will be more circumspect and judicial in any replies that I make to comments.

Respectfully,

/s/ Steve Urie, Judge
Highland Justice Court
55 E Civic Center Drive
Suite 55
Gilbert, Arizona 85296