

BEFORE THE JUDICIAL QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION
STATE OF GEORGIA

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)	
<i>In re: Inquiry Concerning</i>)	Complaint No(s). 2020-280, 2020-316,
Judge Christina Peterson)	2020-317, 2020-525, 2021-017
)	
)	

FORMAL CHARGES

The Judicial Qualifications Commission (“JQC”) Investigative Panel (“IP”) initiated and conducted a Full Investigation regarding allegations of misconduct against Judge Christina Peterson (“Judge Peterson”) of the Probate Court of Douglas County. Pursuant to JQC Rule 17, the IP concluded that formal charges should be instituted for the purpose of determining whether Judge Peterson has violated the Code of Judicial Conduct, and if so, whether she has committed willful misconduct in office, and whether her conduct is prejudicial to the administration of justice such that it brings the judicial office into disrepute.

Accordingly, Director Charles Boring (“the Director”) files the below Formal Charges with the JQC Hearing Panel pursuant to JQC Rule 19 and requests that proceedings be instituted for the purpose of determining whether Judge Peterson’s conduct constitutes a violation of the Code, and if so, the appropriate sanction.

I. JURISDICTION

1.

Judge Peterson was admitted to the State Bar of Georgia in 2013. From the time she was admitted to the State Bar of Georgia until being sworn-in as a judge, Judge Peterson was a practicing attorney.

2.

Judge Peterson qualified to run for Probate Court Judge of Douglas County on March 5, 2020.

3.

Judge Peterson won the primary election on June 9, 2020. Judge Peterson had no opposition for the general election and thus won the seat on November 3, 2020. Judge Peterson was sworn-in as the Probate Court Judge of Douglas County or about December 29, 2020.

4.

At all times pertinent to these Formal Charges, Judge Peterson was a judicial candidate, judge-elect, or a judge, and as such, was subject to the Canons and Rules of the Code of Judicial Conduct and the laws of the State of Georgia.

5.

Judge Peterson's office and courtroom are located at the Douglas County

Courthouse at 8700 Hospital Drive, in Douglasville, Georgia.

II. FACTS

Procedural Background

6.

Complaints #2020-280, #2020-316, and #2020-317 were initiated and/or filed with the JQC between September of 2020 and December of 2020.

7.

Complaints #2020-525 and #2021-017 were filed with the JQC between December of 2020 and January of 2021.

8.

After review of each of the above-referenced complaints, the Director initiated a Preliminary Investigation of Judge Peterson, pursuant to JQC Rule 17 (A). The IP then authorized a Full Investigation pursuant to JQC Rule 17 (B) (3).

9.

Judge Peterson was notified that the IP authorized a Full Investigation, and she was offered the opportunity to appear before the IP. On February 19, 2021, Judge Peterson appeared before the IP, made a statement, and answered questions posed to her by IP members.

10.

The IP subsequently found that there was reasonable cause to believe that

Judge Peterson committed violations of the Code of Judicial Conduct. As such, the Director was instructed to draft and file Formal Charges.

Facts Underlying Formal Charges

11.

Between March 5, 2020 and December 29, 2020, Judge Peterson was maintaining a social media account on Instagram with the name, or “handle” being “officialchristinaj.”

12.

Between March 5, 2020 and December 29, 2020, the “officialchristinaj” Instagram account was public, meaning anyone could view the account’s basic information, or “bio,” and posts. The account’s “bio” included the following:

[Picture of Judge Peterson]

Christina J.

Judge Elect

A ctress [one fairy emoji] #ReadyToLove Season 2 OWN TV

N urturer [one heart emoji]

[petersonforprobate.com/](https://www.petersonforprobate.com/)

13.

On or about March 12, 2020, Judge Peterson, via her “officialchristinaj” Instagram account, posted a flyer for a “BAE,” i.e., “Black and Educated” event at Rose Bar, which is a bar in the Buckhead neighborhood of Atlanta. The flyer stated the event was “Saturday at 10pm.” The flyer included a picture of Judge

Peterson and the address to Rose Bar. The comment posted with the flyer read as follows:

I'll be in the building. If you coughing, stay home. [one emoji with eyes closed and facemask on] [one emoji with eyes closed and kleenex on face]
#readytolove #judgetobe #sheupnext #bae #blackandeducated

14.

At the time that the “Rose Bar” post was last captured and saved, it had 114 likes.

15.

During Judge Peterson’s February 19, 2021 appearance before the IP, she was asked about the “Rose Bar” post, specifically, when she did the event at Rose Bar. Judge Peterson stated “[t]hat was back before COVID” and that “[she] wasn’t even a candidate at that time.”

16.

Between August of 2020 and December of 2020, the “officialchristinaj” Instagram account had 478 posts and 7,416 followers.

17.

On or about August 26, 2020, Judge Peterson, via her “officialchristinaj” Instagram account, posted a picture of herself wearing a “birthday girl” tiara and a dress while sitting in a lounge/bar/club. The comment posted with the picture read as follows:

8/26 was a celebration

If anyone feels like sharing their quarantine wealth, cashapp \$cjpesq.

[three laughing face emojis]

I'm not traveling as I would desire...

But I'm alive and well.

Thank you, Lord. [one praying hands emoji]

Happy Christina J day [one green emoji]

Thank you for all the gifts [one heart emoji]

18.

At the time that the “birthday cash app” post was last captured and saved, it had 251 likes.

19.

Judge Peterson’s birthday is August 26.

20.

During Judge Peterson’s February 19, 2021 appearance before the IP, she was asked about the “birthday cash app” post and stated that it had been posted on her “private personal page.” Despite her claim that the post was to her “private personal page,” and “for [her] friends,” she further stated that “I was wondering on that day why I was getting Cash App from people I didn’t know. And so I noticed – I realized – somebody contacted me in my inbox and say they are posting this on

Douglas County page and things like that.”

21.

On or about August 26, 2020, the “birthday cash app” post was shared by a citizen on a Douglas County citizen group on Facebook. The shared post stated “Our future probate judge wants money on cashapp.”

22.

On or about November 9, 2020, Judge Peterson, via her “officialchristinaj” Instagram account, posted a flyer for an event at Tribeca, which is a restaurant and bar in the Buckhead neighborhood of Atlanta. The flyer included a picture of Judge Peterson and stated “Special Guest Host Judge-Elect & Own’s Ready to Love Christina J (@officialchristinaj).” The comment posted with the flyer read as follows:

See you Wednesday...

[one shouting emoji] **Come party with me.**
-Judge-Elect CJ

For a while now...

**You’ve been asking for something – Sophisticated – Grown – Sexy – with
Beautiful Ambience – R&B Vibe – Dinner – Wine – Cocktails, & -
Professional People.**

**We were listening. The experience you’ve been adamantly requesting has been
created.**

[one star emoji] **We Present ..** [one shouting emoji] [one glass of wine emoji]
“Wine Bottle Wednesdays” [one glass of wine emoji] **6PM-**

MIDNIGHT..WEDNESDAY, November 11, 2020 .. It's "It's Judge @officialchristinaj Edition" .. At the All New Sexy, Upscale, #Chic buckhead restaurant "Tribeca" @tribecabuckhead (1782 Cheshire Bridge Rd NE, Atlanta, GA 30324) 6PM – MIDNIGHT. [one star emoji]

[one champagne toast emoji] **SPECIALS** [one champagne toast emoji]
\$12 Appetizers (6pm – 7pm)
\$8 Glasses of Wine (6pm – 8pm)
Sounds by Debonair Dj Pnut @djpnut 9pm – Midnight.

Reserve Your Table: www.TribecaBuckhead.com

Powered By: @stillchivalrous @darnellhood @ebon.brown

@girlfriends_tribe

[one camera emoji] **@Nightlifelink**

#JudgeEdition
#BaeEdition
#BlackAndEducated
#DinnerWineAndRnB
#DinnerParty
#WineLovers
#LadiesThisForYou
#FellasThisIsWhereTheLadiesWillBe
#DateNight
#YoungPro

23.

At the time that the "Wine Bottle Wednesdays" post was last captured and saved, it had 241 views.

24.

During Judge Peterson's February 19, 2021 appearance before the IP, she was asked about the "Wine Bottle Wednesdays" post, and she stated that "[i]t

wasn't a bar night. It was a professional night." She further added, "[i]t wasn't a bar night. Even though it says wine bottle Wednesday, nobody is having wine. It's professionals gathering."

25.

Between March 5, 2020 and December 29, 2020, Judge Peterson was maintaining a social media account on Twitter under the name "Officialchristinaj" with her "handle" being "@LoveChristinaJ."

26.

Between March 5, 2020 and December 29, 2020, Judge Peterson had a video available for viewing on her Twitter account which portrayed her in a moustache. The caption on the video read "WORD OF THE DAY: HOMELESS-SEXUAL."

27.

The "word of the day" video portrays Judge Peterson speaking with a strong southern accent, acting like she is a person giving an individual by the name of "Ya-Niqua" relationship advice. Judge Peterson's character tells "Ya-Niqua" that she "[d]idn't want to hear about it no more, don't want to hear about about DeAndre," "what you got there 'Ya-Niqua,' you've only been doing this dude for three days...three days 'YaNiqua'...what you got there is a homeless-sexual." She continues, stating "[t]hat man says he's in love with you...that man will do anything for a place to stay...you made that bed with that homeless-sexual."

During the video, Judge Peterson also makes reference to the male genitals, specifically, the African-American male genitals.

III. RULES OF THE CODE OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT IMPLICATED BY JUDGE PETERSON'S CONDUCT

Rule 1.2 (A)

28.

Rule 1.2 (A) of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct states:

Judges shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary.

Rule 1.2 (B)

29.

Rule 1.2 (B) of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct states:

An independent and honorable judiciary is indispensable to justice in our society. Judges shall participate in establishing, maintaining, and enforcing high standards of conduct, and shall personally observe such standards of conduct so that the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary may be preserved. The provisions of this Code should be construed and applied to further that objective.

Rule 1.3

30.

Rule 1.3 of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct states:

Judges shall not lend the prestige of their office to advance the private interests of the judge or others.

Rule 3.1 (A)

31.

Rule 3.1 (A) of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct states:

Judges shall not engage in extra-judicial activities that detract from the dignity of their office or interfere with the performance of their judicial duties.

IV. VIOLATIONS OF THE CODE OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

COUNT ONE

32.

On and between March 5, 2020 and December 29, 2020, Judge Peterson did fail to act in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity and impartiality of the judiciary in violation of Rule 1.2 (A) of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct, by posting the “Rose Bar” post on her Instagram account where she was advertising for an event at Rose Bar using her judicial status as part of the advertisement, posting the “birthday cash app” post on her Instagram account where she was publicly asking for money via Cash App, posting the “Wine Bottle Wednesdays” post on her Instagram account advertising for an event at Tribeca with wine and food specials using her judicial status as part of the advertisement, and having available for viewing on her Twitter account the

“Word of the Day” video where she discusses “homeless-sexuals,” and makes inappropriate sexual commentary.

COUNT TWO

33.

On and between March 5, 2020 and December 29, 2020, Judge Peterson did fail to establish, maintain, and enforce high standards of conduct, and to personally observe such standards of conduct so that the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary may be preserved, in violation of Rule 1.2 (B) of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct, by posting the “Rose Bar” post on her Instagram account where she was advertising for an event at Rose Bar using her judicial status as part of the advertisement, posting the “birthday cash app” post on her Instagram account where she was publicly asking for money via Cash App, posting the “Wine Bottle Wednesdays” post on her Instagram account advertising for an event at Tribeca with wine and food specials using her judicial status as part of the advertisement, and having available for viewing on her Twitter account the “Word of the Day” video where she discusses “homeless-sexuals,” and makes inappropriate sexual commentary.

COUNT THREE

34.

On and between March 5, 2020 and December 29, 2020, Judge Peterson did

engage in extra-judicial activities that detracted from the dignity of her office, in violation of Rule 3.1 (A) of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct, by posting the “Rose Bar” post on her Instagram account where she was advertising for an event at a bar using her judicial status as part of the advertisement, posting the “birthday cash app” post on her Instagram account where she was publicly asking for money via Cash App, posting the “Wine Bottle Wednesdays” post on her Instagram account advertising for an event at Tribeca with wine and food specials using her judicial status as part of the advertisement, and having available for viewing on her Twitter account the “Word of the Day” video where she discusses “homeless-sexuals,” and makes inappropriate sexual commentary.

COUNT FOUR

35.

On and between March 12, 2020 and November 9, 2020, Judge Peterson did lend the prestige of her office to advance her private interests, in violation of Rule 1.3 of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct, by using her judicial status in advertisements for events at Rose Bar and Tribeca, businesses in Atlanta.

IV. CONCLUSION.

36.

Violations of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct support discipline when they amount to “willful misconduct in office” or “conduct prejudicial to the

administration of justice which brings the judicial office into disrepute.” Ga. Const. of 1983, Art. VI, Sec. VII, Par. VII (a); JQC Rule 6 (A) (5). Judge Peterson’s conduct as alleged above amounts to willful misconduct in office and is prejudicial to the administration of justice, bringing her judicial office into disrepute. Therefore, the Director hereby seeks disciplinary action for the above-stated violations of the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct.

NOTICE OF FORMAL CHARGES

Pursuant to JQC Rules 13, 19, and 20, and by filing these Formal Charges with the Hearing Panel, Judge Peterson is hereby notified of the above alleged misconduct and is required to file a verified answer to these charges with the Clerk of the Supreme Court and serve a copy of the verified answer on the Director. The answer shall be filed within thirty (30) days after service of these Formal Charges. Failure to answer the Formal Charges shall constitute an admission of the factual allegations pursuant to JQC Rule 21 (A).

Respectfully submitted this 16th day of July, 2021.

s:\CHARLES P. BORING
Charles P. Boring, Director
Judicial Qualifications Commission
1995 North Park Place SE, Suite 570
Atlanta, GA 30339
Georgia Bar No. 065131
cboring@gajqc.gov

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

Pursuant to Judicial Qualifications Commission Rule 13, the Director certifies that he has this day served the following:

Formal Charges

by placing a true and correct copy of the same in the United States mail in an envelope properly addressed with adequate postage thereon to ensure delivery upon the following, and by forwarding via electronic mail to the below address:

Judge Christina J. Peterson
8700 Hospital Drive, 3rd Floor, Judicial Side
Douglasville, GA 30134
cjpeteronlaw@gmail.com

This 16th day of July, 2021.

s:\CHARLES P. BORING
Charles P. Boring, Director
Judicial Qualifications Commission
1995 North Park Place SE, Suite 570
Atlanta, GA 30339
Georgia Bar No. 065131
cboring@gajqc.gov