

**STATE OF ALASKA**  
**COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT**



**2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

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# Alaska Commission on Judicial Conduct

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March 05, 2024

## MEMORANDUM


**TO:**                   Honorable Peter J. Maassen  
                          Chief Justice, Alaska Supreme Court  
                          303 K St., 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
                          Anchorage, AK 99501

                          Honorable Mike Dunleavy  
                          Governor of the State of Alaska  
                          P.O. Box 110001  
                          Juneau, AK 99811

                          Senator Gary Stevens  
                          President of the Alaska Senate  
                          State Capitol, Rm 111  
                          Juneau, AK 99801

                          Representative Cathy Tilton  
                          Speaker of the House  
                          State Capitol, Rm 208  
                          Juneau, AK 99801

                          Mr. Jeffrey Robinson  
                          President, Alaska Bar Association  
                          840 K Street, Suite 100  
                          Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3353

**FROM:**           Marla N. Greenstein, Executive Director 

**RE:**               **2023 Annual Report**

The attached annual report outlines the activities of the Commission on Judicial Conduct during the calendar year 2023. This past calendar year continued to be a productive year for the Commission and one that emphasized our continued responsiveness to the concerns of the public. This report also highlights our plans for 2024. It is provided to you as required by the Commission's Rules of Procedure. Additional copies are available through our office or more easily available at: [www.acjc.alaska.gov](http://www.acjc.alaska.gov).

**ALASKA COMMISSION ON  
JUDICIAL CONDUCT  
2023 Roster**

**Public Members**

**Todd Fletcher**  
510 L Street, Suite 585  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
*(Term expires March 1, 2027)*

**Aldean Kilbourn**  
510 L Street, Suite 585  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
*(Term expires March 1, 2025)*

**Robert Sheldon**  
510 L Street, Suite 585  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
*(Term expires March 1, 2024)*

**Attorney Members**

**Donald W. McClintock**  
510 L Street, Suite 585  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
*(Term expires March 1, 2025)*

**Jane Mores**  
510 L Street, Suite 585  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
*(Term expires March 1, 2024)*

**Karla Taylor-Welch**  
510 L Street, Suite 585  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
*(Term expires March 1, 2024)*

**Judge Members**

**Judge Amy G. Mead**  
Alaska Superior Court  
PO BOX 114100  
Juneau, Alaska 99881  
*(Term expires February 1, 2027)*

**Judge Paul A. Roetman**  
Alaska Superior Court  
PO BOX 317  
Kotzebue, Alaska  
*(Term expires February 1, 2024)*  
*(Chairperson)*

**Judge Thomas I. Temple**  
Alaska Superior Court  
101 Lacey Street  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701  
*(Term expires February 1, 2027)*

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# **INTRODUCTION**

Alaska's Commission on Judicial Conduct was created by amendment to the state constitution in 1968. The Commission is composed of three state court judges, three attorneys who have practiced law in the state for at least ten years, and three members of the public. This group of nine individuals from differing backgrounds and geographical areas addresses problems of judicial conduct and disability. Complaints alleging judicial misconduct may be filed by any person.

# COMMISSIONER BIOGRAPHIES

## Public Members (2023)

**TODD FLETCHER** was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska. He graduated from Service High School in 1983 and received his BA in Accounting from Western Washington University. Todd has been married to Lisa for over 25 years and they have two teenagers, Logan, who attends Dixie State in St. George, Utah, and Lauren who attends Dimond High School. He is the Branch Manager and a Senior Vice President-Investment Officer for Wells Fargo Advisors in Anchorage. He is an Eagle Scout and enjoys travel, music, camping, and softball. He was appointed to the Commission in 2019.

**ALDEAN KILBOURN** was born and raised in Olympia, Washington. She graduated in 1972 from the University of Washington, her major in Political Science and a minor in French. She married in 1972 and moved to Fairbanks, Alaska, where she and her husband have raised three boys. She earned her Alaska teaching certificate in 1974 from University of Alaska, Fairbanks, first substituting and then teaching full-time at the secondary level for the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. From 1999 until 2010, Aldean was also a Project C.R.I.S.S. (CReating Independence through Student-owned Strategies) instructor for district teachers. Aldean earned her Master's in Library and Information Science from the University of Washington in 2007. She has been active in the Fairbanks community in the historic Clay Street Cemetery Commission, the Fairbanks Genealogical Society, and Theta Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma (a world-wide teachers' organization). As hobbies, her favorite activities include flying, snow machining, target practice, and reading. She was appointed to the Commission in 2021.

**ROBERT D. SHELDON** is a lifelong Alaskan who was raised in Talkeetna. He has a Bachelor of Science in Finance and a minor in Economics from Colorado State University. Robert has served as a director or partner for privately held organizations in aviation, banking, finance, oil & gas, and tourism. He also is active in the business community facilitating, financing, and encouraging relationships across the high latitudes and is a member of Omicron Delta Epsilon, an international economics society. His broad interest in finance extends into understanding interconnections with the judiciary. Robert has been married to Marne Sheldon for 29 years and they raised three sons. He was appointed to the Commission in 2008.

## Attorney Members (2023)

**DON MCCLINTOCK** is an attorney in private practice with the law firm of Ashburn & Mason, PC., where he focuses on real estate and corporate transactions and finance, as well as eminent domain and land use litigation. Don worked as a law clerk for Justice Warren Matthews of the Alaska Supreme Court, and as an assistant attorney general for the State of Alaska. Don served on the Alaska Bar Association Board of Governors from 2008 to 2014, and has volunteered for many civic organizations over the years. He is a graduate of Stanford University (AB '76) and Harvard Law School (JD '80). He was appointed to the Commission in 2017.

**JANE MORES** was born in Canton, Ohio and moved to Southeast Alaska as a teenager. She is a graduate of Auburn University (BS '86) and the Ohio State College of Law (JD '90). Her legal career began with a firm in Anchorage, followed by nine years of private practice in Haines. Jane joined the City and Borough of Juneau Law Department's Civil Section in 2009, where she worked until semi-retiring in 2019. In 2021, Jane was beckoned back to a full-time public law practice. She is currently a Senior Assistant Attorney General in the Department of Law, Transportation Section. Jane served on the Alaska Bar Association Ethics Committee from 2002 to 2008. She was appointed to the Commission in 2019.

**KARLA TAYLOR-WELCH** was born and raised in Fairbanks, Alaska. She received her bachelors ('77), masters ('78) and juris doctorate ('83) from Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Ms. Taylor-Welch worked for the Department of Law from 1984-2005 as an Assistant District Attorney and an Assistant Attorney General. She spent 11 years total in the DOA and 10 years in the AGO handling children and juvenile cases, as well as adult protection cases. From 2005, until her retirement in 2017, she worked for the Fairbanks section of OPA, the last two and a half years as the supervisor of the Fairbanks office. She remains an active bar member, working occasionally for private firms. Since retirement from the State of Alaska, she has been enjoying her time traveling, biking, skiing, swimming, and playing with her grandchildren. Because 2020 curtailed travel plans, she spent her time improving her skills in the fiber and quilting arts. She was appointed to the Commission in 2016.

## **Judicial Members (2023)**

**HONORABLE ERIN B. MARSTON (February 2015 – February 2023)** is a Superior Court Judge in the Third Judicial District in Anchorage. Judge Marston was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska. He graduated from West Anchorage High School and Colby College. He received his legal education from the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law. He was admitted to state and federal practice in Alaska in 1985. Judge Marston was appointed to the bench in 2012 following nearly 30 years of private practice in Anchorage including time as an Assistant District Attorney. Judge Marston is assigned to the criminal docket. He was appointed to the Commission in 2015.

**HONORABLE AMY GURTON MEAD** is a Superior Court Judge in Juneau. She holds a JD Degree from Tulane Law School and a B.A. in Psychology from Boston University. Judge Mead was the Municipal Attorney for the City and Borough of Juneau when she was appointed to the bench in 2018. She began her career clerking for the Honorable Thomas Janke in Ketchikan, worked as a prosecutor for the State of Alaska, and spent a number of years in private practice before joining the City and Borough of Juneau's law department in 2010. Judge Mead is currently the Presiding Judge for the First Judicial District. She served on the Commission as an attorney member from 2012 until 2018 and was reappointed to the Commission in 2022.

**HONORABLE PAUL A. ROETMAN** moved to Alaska in 1972 and has lived in Kotzebue 17 years. He was appointed to the superior court in 2010. He earned a B.A. in Economics from the University of Alaska, Anchorage and received his law degree from Regent University School of Law in Virginia. Prior to law school he worked out of Port Valdez as a commercial fisherman and as Executive Director of the Prince William Sound Economic Development Council. After law school, he worked for a civil law firm, the Alaska Legislature, and as a prosecutor for the State of Alaska. Judge Roetman currently serves as Chair of the Alaska Commission on Judicial Conduct, and is a member of the Three-Judge Sentencing Panel and the Statewide Security and Emergency Preparedness Committee. Judge Roetman is the Presiding Judge for the Second Judicial District. He was appointed to the Commission in 2018.

**HONORABLE THOMAS I. TEMPLE** is a Superior Court Judge in the Fourth Judicial District in Fairbanks. He enlisted in the Marines at age seventeen, serving as a machine gunner during the Gulf War. Judge Temple then worked his way through college and law school at George Mason University, while serving in the Army National Guard. In 2001, he moved to Alaska and served as a prosecutor in Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Utqiagvik, before entering private practice in Fairbanks, focusing on criminal defense and civil litigation. Judge Temple was appointed to the bench in 2018 and serves on the Criminal Rules Committee and the Court Security and Emergency Preparedness Committee. He was appointed to the Commission in 2023.

# I. THE COMMISSION'S ROLE AND FUNCTION

## A. Judicial Officers Who Come Under the Commission's Authority

Alaska's Commission on Judicial Conduct oversees the conduct of justices of the Alaska Supreme Court, judges of the state court of appeals, state superior court judges, and state district court judges. The commission may not handle complaints against magistrates, administrative law judges, masters, attorneys, or federal judicial officers.

**Complaints against state magistrates and masters are handled by the presiding superior court judge for their respective judicial districts:**

### **First Judicial District**

Honorable Amy G. Mead  
Alaska Superior Court  
P.O. BOX 114100  
Juneau, Alaska 99811

### **Second Judicial District**

Honorable Paul A. Roetman  
Alaska Superior Court  
P.O. BOX 317  
Kotzebue, Alaska 99752-0317

### **Third Judicial District**

Honorable Thomas A. Matthews  
Alaska Superior Court  
825 West 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2004

### **Fourth Judicial District**

Honorable Brent E. Bennett  
Alaska Superior Court  
101 Lacey Street  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

**Complaints against attorneys can be directed to:**

Phil Shanahan, Bar Counsel  
Alaska Bar Association  
Box 100279  
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

**Complaints against federal judges in Alaska are handled by:**

Assistant Circuit Executive  
United States Court of Appeals  
P.O. Box 193939  
San Francisco, California 94119  
Telephone (415) 556-6100

**Complaints against Administrative Law Judges  
in Alaska can be directed to:**

Chief Administrative Law Judge  
Office of Administrative Hearings  
Department of Administration  
550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1940  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

**B. Types of Complaints the Commission May Address (“Jurisdictional”)**

**1. Misconduct**

The broadest category of conduct complaints against judges falls under the term "misconduct." Judicial misconduct has a very specific meaning under the Code of Judicial Conduct. The Code of Judicial Conduct generally governs the activities of judges both on and off the bench. It is a comprehensive statement of appropriate judicial behavior and has been adopted by the Alaska Supreme Court as part of the Rules of Court. Judicial misconduct can be divided into several categories.

**(a) Improper Courtroom Behavior**

At times complaints against judges allege improper behavior in the courtroom during a trial. Allegations of improper courtroom behavior may include: improper consideration and treatment of attorneys, parties, witnesses, and others in the hearing; improper physical conduct; or persistent failure to dispose of business promptly and responsibly.

Examples of improper courtroom behavior include racist or sexist comments by a judge, and sleeping or drunkenness on the bench. Judges can also be disciplined for administrative failures such as taking an excessive amount of time to make a decision.

**(b) Improper or Illegal Influence**

Judges must be independent from all outside influences that may affect their ability to be fair and impartial. Consequently, judges are restricted as to the types of activities in which they can participate. At a minimum, judges cannot allow

family, social, or political relationships to influence any judicial decision. Judges also should not hear a matter in which the judge has a personal interest in the outcome. Extreme examples of improper influence would include the giving or receiving of gifts, bribes, loans, or favors. To help assure judicial independence, judges are required to file financial disclosure statements with the court and other financial statements with the Alaska Public Offices Commission.

### **(c) Impropriety Off the Bench**

Judges are required to live an exemplary life off the bench, as well. Consequently, the Commission has the authority and responsibility to look at judges' activities outside of the courtroom. Complaints dealing with off-the-bench conduct might allege: misuse of public employees or misappropriation of property or money for personal purposes; improper speech or associations; interference with a pending or impending lawsuit; lewd or corrupt personal life; or use of the judicial position to extort or embezzle funds. Clearly, off-the-bench conduct includes a wide range of behavior from merely inappropriate actions to criminal violations.

### **(d) Other Improper Activities**

Judges are also subject to restrictions in other aspects of their positions. These include prohibitions against: conducting proceedings or discussions involving one party to a legal dispute; interfering with the attorney-client relationship; bias; improper campaign activities; abusing the prestige of the judicial office; obstructing justice; and criminal behavior.

## **2. Physical or Mental Disability**

Apart from allegations of misconduct in office, the Commission also has the authority and responsibility to address allegations of judges' physical and mental disabilities. Disabilities may include: alcohol or drug abuse, senility, serious physical illness, or mental illness.

The Commission can require medical examinations as part of its investigation and also can recommend counseling when appropriate.

### **C. Complaints the Commission May Not Address (“Nonjurisdictional”)**

The Commission has no authority to address questions of law, which are the most common complaints the Commission receives. Frequently, complaints allege dissatisfaction with decisions that judges make in their judicial capacity. For example, individuals often complain of wrong child custody awards or sentences that judges impose in criminal cases. The Commission may not enter into cases or reverse judicial decisions. That role belongs to the appellate courts.

## **II. HOW THE COMMISSION OPERATES**

### **A. Filing a Complaint**

While the Commission may initiate its own investigation, complaints can also be filed against any state judge by any member of the public. A blank complaint form is in **Appendix F** of this report. A form is not necessary, but the complaint should be in writing and should include enough information to enable the Commission staff to begin an investigation. Necessary information includes: the judge's name, the conduct complained of, a case number if it involves a court case, and the names of others present or aware of the facts. Complaints must be **signed** and should be sent to:

**Alaska Commission on Judicial Conduct**  
**510 L Street, Suite 585**  
**Anchorage, Alaska 99501**

Signed complaints may be e-mailed to [administrator@acjc.state.ak.us](mailto:administrator@acjc.state.ak.us). Commission staff is available to provide technical assistance to anyone trying to submit a complaint.

### **B. Complaint Investigation**

Soon after a complaint is filed, Commission staff will review and research the accusation, which can include reviewing relevant CourtView information and interviewing the person who filed the complaint to determine the facts giving rise to the complaint and to ascertain whether or not the complaint appears to fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission. The Commission reviews all complaints and staff research and determines whether the complaint is jurisdictional or nonjurisdictional. Complaints that are nonjurisdictional are dismissed. All jurisdictional complaints are investigated. If after further investigation the Commission finds the accusation to be without merit, it will be



dismissed. If a preliminary investigation supports the complaint, a formal investigation begins. It is at this stage that the judge involved is informed of the complaint. A formal investigation often includes an interview with the judge.

Complaints filed with the Commission and all Commission inquiries and investigations are confidential. If the Commission finds probable cause exists to find a judge has committed misconduct that warrants action more serious than a private admonishment or counseling, a formal statement of charges is issued. The statement of charges is public information. Some time after the formal charges issue, the Commission will hold an open public formal hearing on the matter. At the hearing, Special Counsel (hired by the Commission) presents the evidentiary case against the judge. The judge is often represented by an attorney who presents the judge's evidence and defenses. The full Commission usually serves as the factfinder in the matter.

The Commission's decision is based on the evidence presented and is a public document. It may decide to exonerate the judge of the charge or charges if there is a lack of clear and convincing evidence of misconduct or recommend that the Alaska Supreme Court take formal action. The Alaska Supreme Court may impose one of the following sanctions against the judge: suspension, removal, retirement, censure, or reprimand. The Alaska Supreme Court independently reviews the evidence and may decide not to impose any discipline.

## COMMISSION COMPLAINT PROCESS

The complaint process begins when a written complaint is received by Commission staff. If the Commission determines that the complaint falls *outside the Commission's authority*, such as a complaint about an attorney or about a judge's legal decision, the complaint is *dismissed*\* by the Commission. If the complaint appears to be *within the Commission's authority*, a case number is assigned to the complaint and an initial *investigation* is begun.

During the initial *investigation* stage, a complaint is examined to determine if there is enough evidence to warrant a further investigation. Generally, this process includes close examination of the written complaint (including any evidence or explanation attached), an inspection of any relevant court documents, and, if applicable, review of court hearing audio.

If the Commission determines that there is no reliable evidence supporting the complaint, it is *dismissed*\* by the Commission at a meeting.

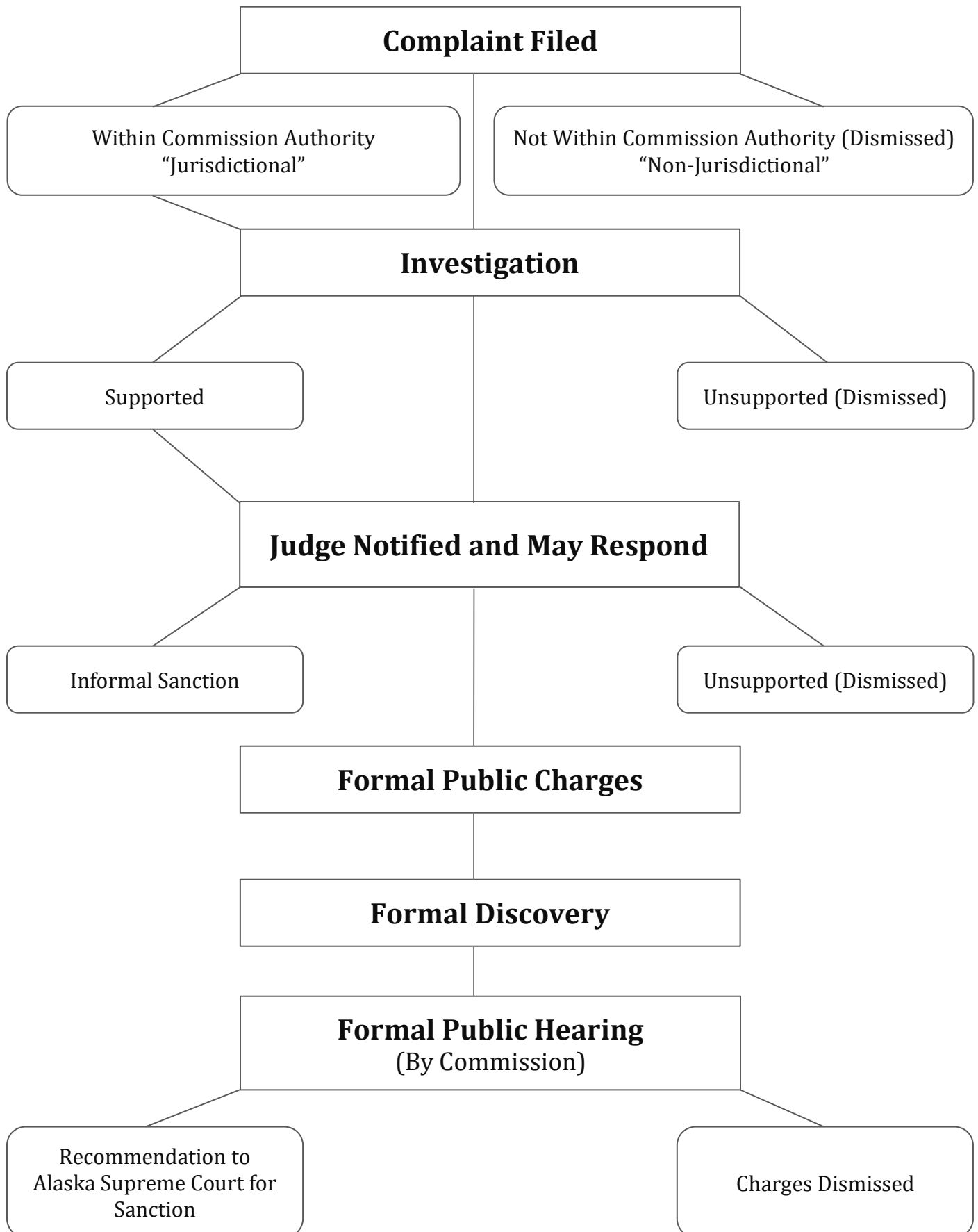
If the Commission determines the complaint appears to have enough substance to warrant action, the *judge in question is notified and given an opportunity to respond*. During this stage, the judge may provide information showing the complaint to be unfounded, may receive a private *informal admonishment*, or *private counseling*. The Commission may, after a determination of probable cause, issue *formal charges* of one or more violations of the Code of Judicial Conduct. The *issuing* of formal charges by the Commission starts a period of *formal discovery*, where both the Special Counsel hired by the Commission and the accused judge gather evidence and information to support their respective positions.

After the formal discovery period, a *public hearing* is held. The hearing is usually conducted by the Commission (but it is possible that a Special Master could be appointed). Special Counsel presents the case against the judge and the judge will often hire an attorney for his or her defense. There are two possible outcomes from the public hearing; either the charges are dismissed, or the Commission finds the judge committed misconduct and *recommends sanctions to the Alaska Supreme Court*.

The Alaska Supreme Court may carry out the Commission's recommended sanctions, modify them, or overturn the Commission's decision.

\*Prior to dismissal by the Commission, staff notifies the complainant in writing of the staff recommendation to dismiss.

# Commission Complaint Process



### **III. CALENDAR YEAR 2023 ACTIVITIES**

#### **A. Summary of Complaints**

The tables that follow summarize the current Commission caseload. Complaint filing numbers reflect only written complaints received by the Commission and do not reflect the numerous telephone inquiries staff receives. In 2023, staff responded in writing to 50 inquiries and approximately 200 verbal and e-mail inquiries. “Complaints closed” during the annual report year may include complaints filed in a prior year but not closed until the annual report year.

In 2023, staff continued to make a concentrated effort to screen many complaints before they actually were filed with the Commission. 13 new jurisdictional complaints were filed this year. Of those jurisdictional complaints, four were eventually dismissed. Of eight remaining jurisdictional complaints from 2022, six were dismissed, one proceeded to a Formal Hearing and a recommendation for discipline to the Alaska Supreme Court, and one remains pending.

The Commission opens approximately one complaint every month that requires staff investigation. In August of 1991, the Commission adopted a policy of processing all new incoming complaints within 90 days. Should the Commission receive more than four jurisdictional complaints in a month, the Commission established a minimum goal of fully investigating at least three complaints per month.

# Table 1

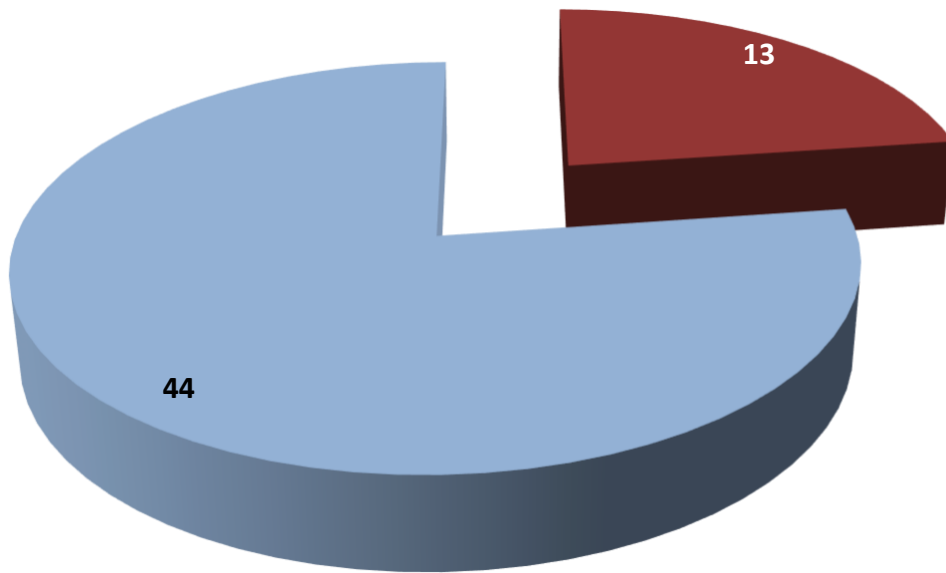
## Complaints Filed in 2023

Within the Commission's Authority	<i>Jurisdictional</i>	13
Not Within the Commission's Authority	<i>Non-Jurisdictional</i>	44
<b>Total New Complaints</b>		<b>57</b>

Not included are complaints received against attorneys, administrative law judges, magistrate judges or federal judges. Those were forwarded to the appropriate disciplinary authority.

# Figure 1

2023 Complaint Filings



■ Jurisdictional   ■ Non-Jurisdictional

# Table 1a

## Total Number of Judges who Served by Judicial District

<b>Judicial District</b>	<b># of Judges</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	8
2 <sup>nd</sup>	7
3 <sup>rd</sup>	41
4 <sup>th</sup>	13
Appellate Courts	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79</b>

This table indicates the total number of judges who served in the district in 2023. This number may be more than the authorized judicial positions in each district.

# Table 1b

## Number of Judges Named in Jurisdictional Complaints Filed in 2023

<b>Judicial District</b>	<b>Urban*</b> (# of Complaints)	<b>Urban**</b> (# of Judges Named)	<b>Rural</b> (# of Complaints)	<b>Rural**</b> (# of Judges Named)
1 <sup>st</sup>	1	1	0	0
2 <sup>nd</sup>	n/a	n/a	2	1
3 <sup>rd</sup>	5	5	1	1
4 <sup>th</sup>	2	2	2	2
Appellate Courts	0	0	n/a	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

Jurisdictional complaints are defined as those that are within the Commission’s authority.

\*Urban courts have been defined as court sites in: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Palmer.

\*\*Complaints by judge reflect the judge named in the complaint and may include more than one judge/justice. Therefore, the numbers may total more than the total judicial positions in that district.



# Table 1c

## Number of Judges Named in Non-Jurisdictional Complaints Filed in 2023

<b>Judicial District</b>	<b>Urban*</b> (# of Complaints)	<b>Urban**</b> (# of Judges Named)	<b>Rural</b> (# of Complaints)	<b>Rural**</b> (# of Judges Named)
1 <sup>st</sup>	3	3	2	2
2 <sup>nd</sup>	n/a	n/a	0	0
3 <sup>rd</sup>	24	21	6	6
4 <sup>th</sup>	1	1	8	5
Appellate Courts	0	0	n/a	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>

Non-Jurisdictional complaints are defined as those that are not within the Commission's authority.

\*Urban courts have been defined as court sites in: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Palmer.

\*\*Complaints by judge reflect the judge named in the complaint and may include more than one judge/justice. Therefore, the numbers may total more than the total judicial positions in that district.

# Table 2

## Comparison with Previous Years' Filings

### Total Accusations Filed by Calendar Year

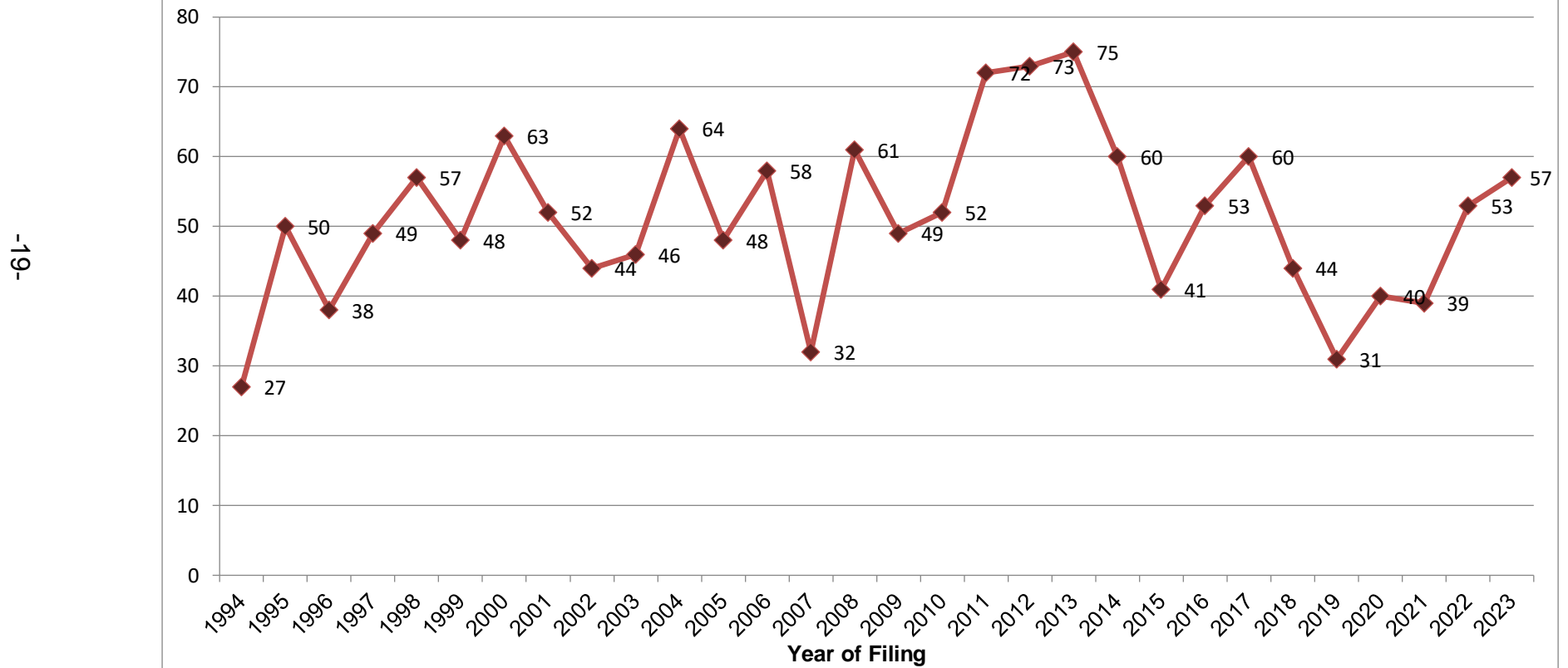
(Includes complaints both within the Commission's authority, and those not within the Commission's authority that were not screened out prior to receipt)

<b>2023</b>	<b>57</b>	2008	61
2022	53	2007	32
2021	39	2006	58
2020	40	2005	48
2019	31	2004	64
2018	44	2003	46
2017	60	2002	44
2016	53	2001	52
2015	41	2000	63
2014	60	1999	48
2013	75	1998	57
2012	73	1997	49
2011	72	1996	38
2010	52	1995	50
2009	49	1994	27

\*Beginning in 1990, Commission staff have made a concentrated effort to actively screen accusations that are outside the Commission's authority prior to filing. This active screening process accounts for the apparent drop in accusation filings since 1989 published in prior annual reports.

# Figure 2

## Total Filings Comparison by Year



-19-

# Table 3

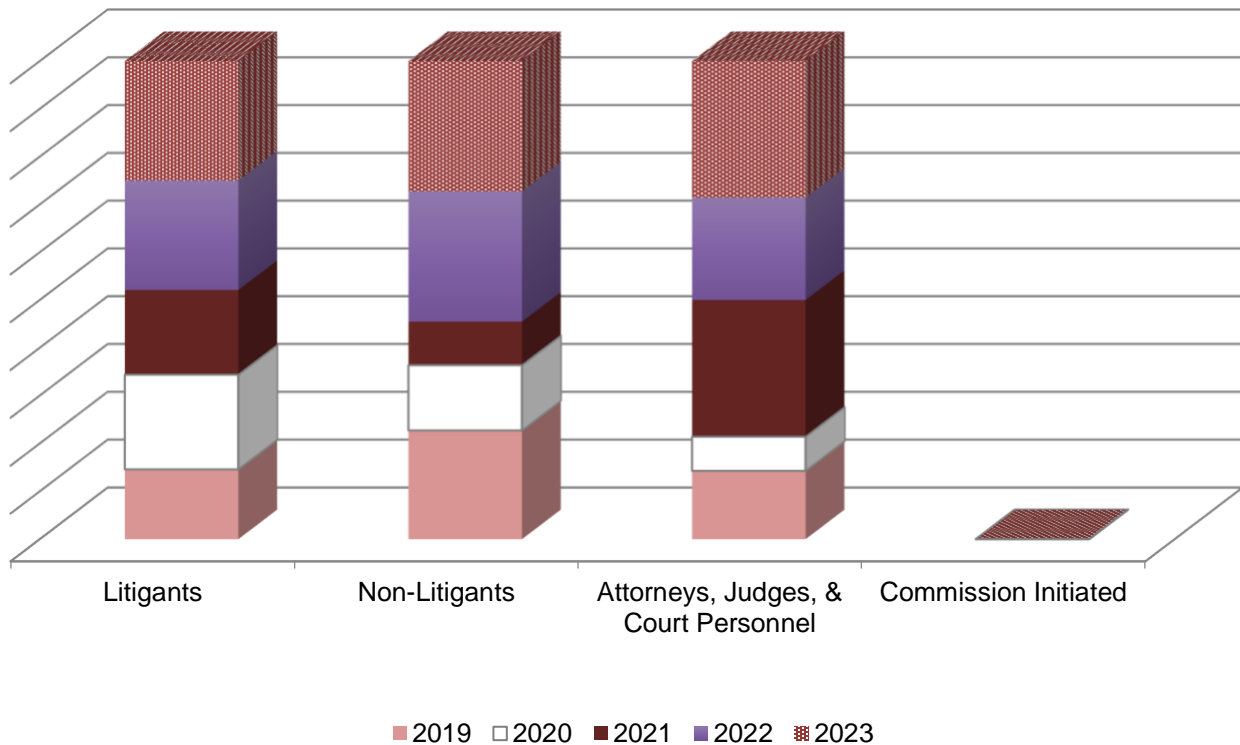
## Complaint Sources

(Jurisdictional and Non-Jurisdictional Filed by Year 2019 - 2023)

Complaint Sources	2019*	2020*	2021*	2022	2023*
Litigants	28	38	34	44	48
Non-Litigants	5	3	2	6	6
Attorneys/Judges/Court Personnel	2	1	4	3	4
Commission Initiated	0	0	0	0	0

\*Some complaints had multiple sources &/or some complainants filed multiple complaints

### Figure 3 Comparison of Complaint Sources



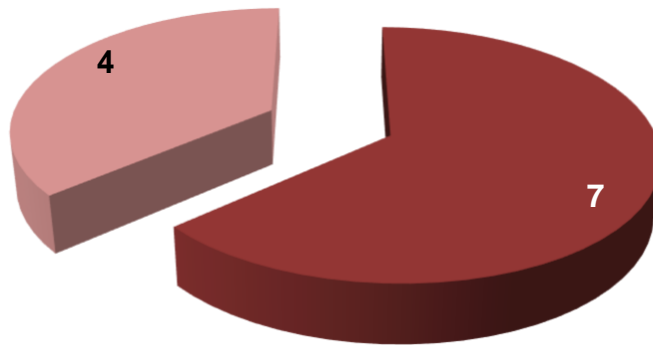
# Table 4

## 2023 Jurisdictional Complaint Closures

Closed Complaints Filed prior to 2023	7
Closed Complaints Filed in 2023	4

# Figure 4

## 2023 Jurisdictional Complaint Closures



■ Complaints Initiated Prior to 2023    ■ Complaints Initiated in 2023

# Table 5

## Complaints Disposed in 2023

### Complaints Outside the Commission's Authority

Dissatisfaction with Legal Ruling	29
Other	6
<b>Total Non-Jurisdictional Complaints Processed</b>	<b>35</b>

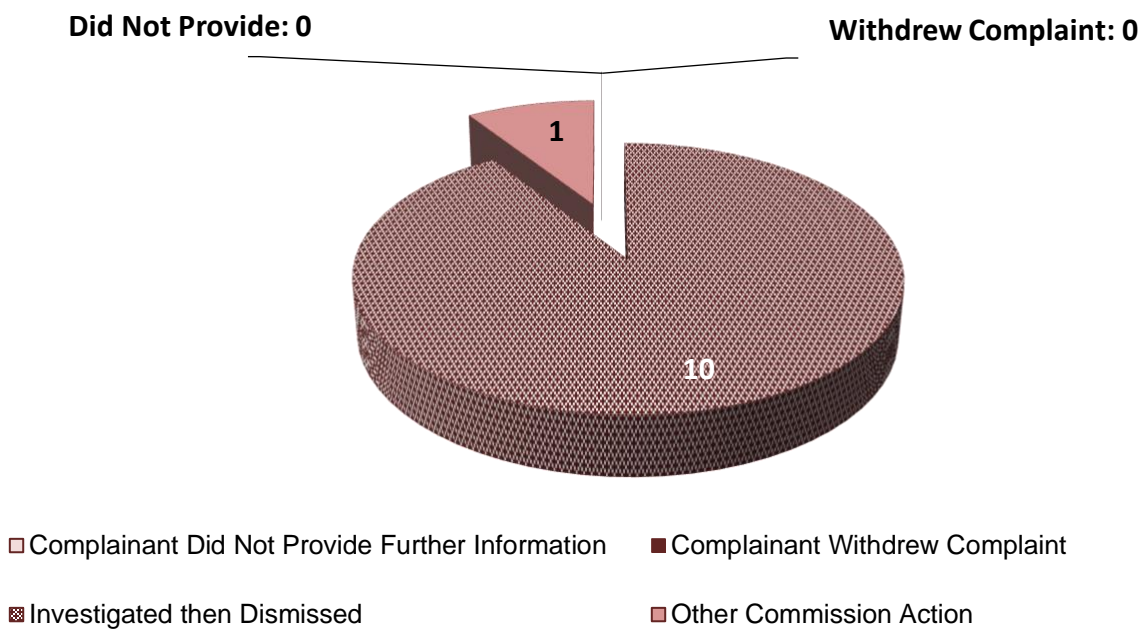
### Complaints Within the Commission's Authority

Complainant Did Not Provide Further Information	0
Complainant Withdrew Complaint	0
Investigated then Dismissed	10
Further Commission Action	1
<b>Total Jurisdictional Complaints Processed</b>	<b>11</b>

Not included are complaints received against attorneys, administrative law judges, magistrate judges, or federal judges, which were forwarded to the appropriate disciplinary authority. Complaints may include those that were filed in prior years.

# Figure 5

## Jurisdictional Complaints Processed in 2023



# Table 6

## Comparison with Previous Years' Closures\*

Total Jurisdictional Complaints Closed per year

<b>2023</b>	<b>11</b>
2022	6
2021	4
2020	13
2019	9
2018	8
2017	10
2016	7
2015	9
2014	11
2013	17
2012	5
2011	22
2010	14
2009	13

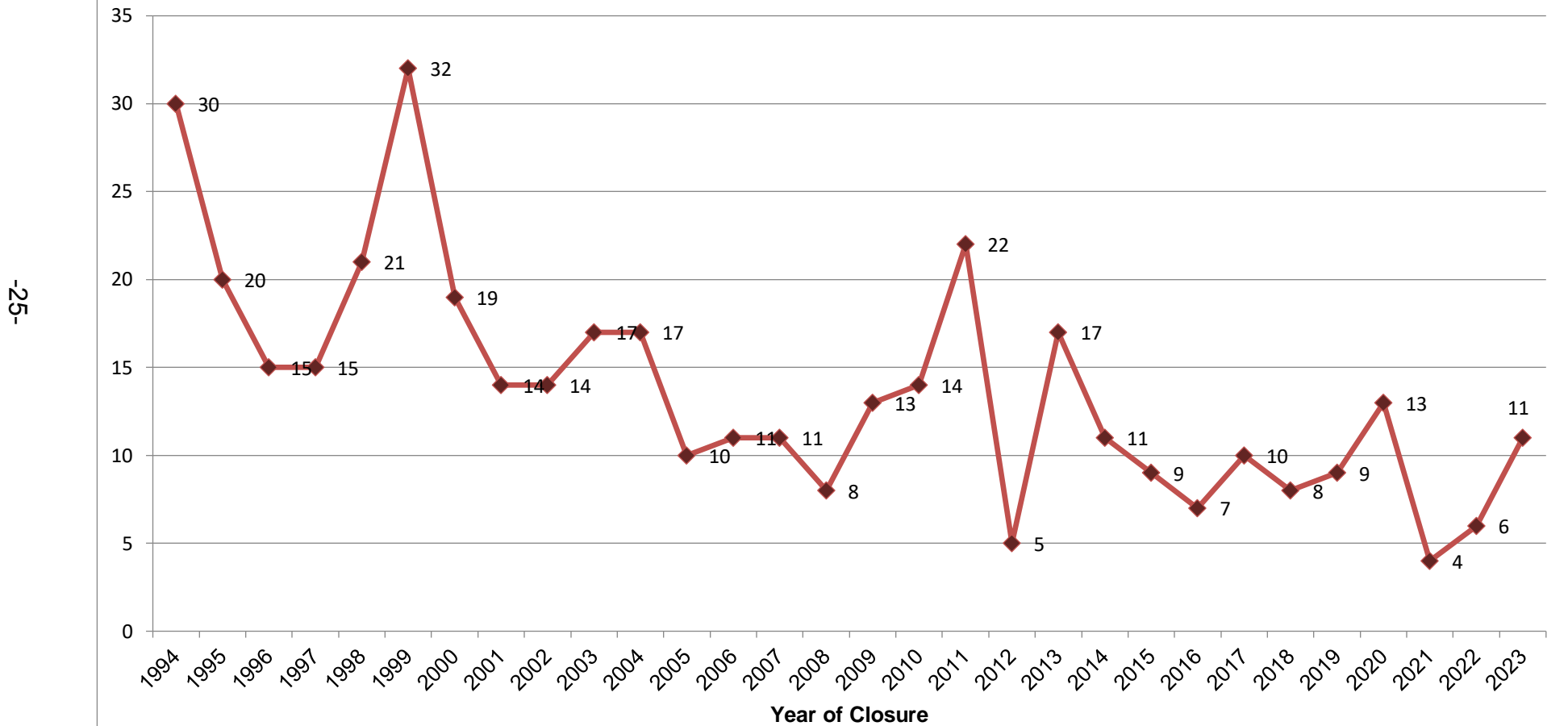
2008	8
2007	11
2006	11
2005	10
2004	17
2003	17
2002	14
2001	14
2000	19
1999	32
1998	21
1997	15
1996	15
1995	20
1994	30

\*Complaints closed in a particular year may not all have been filed in that same year. Prior to 1989, it was the Commission's policy to open a complaint for every inquiry made with the Commission's office. After 1989, the Commission opened files only for those matters that, on their face, were within the Commission's authority. Therefore, the numbers **before** 1989, published in prior annual reports, are not directly comparable to those **after** 1989.



# Figure 6

## Complaint Closure Comparison By Year



# Table 7

## Actions Taken: 2019 - 2023

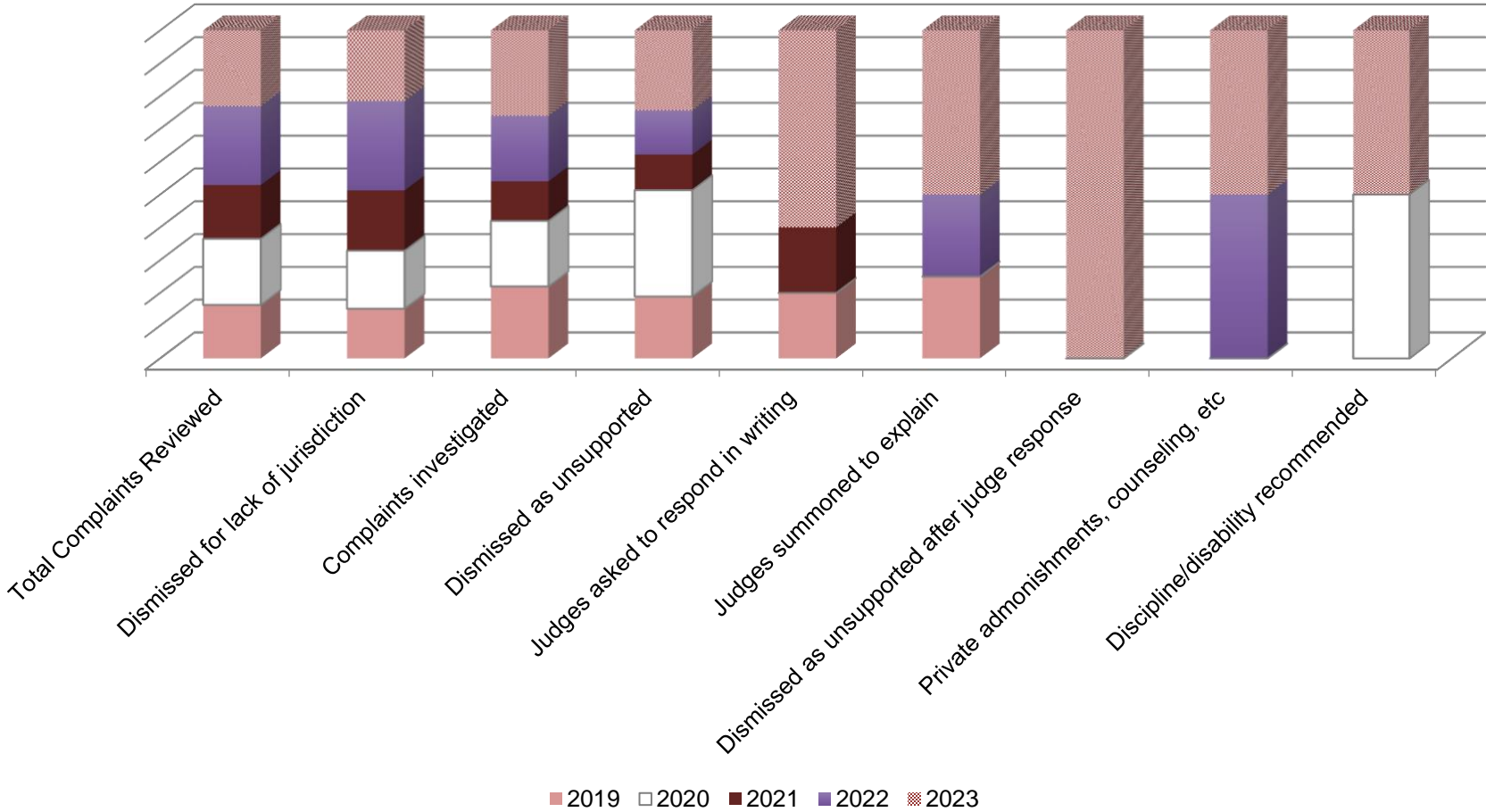
<b>Actions Taken</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Total Complaints Reviewed	34	42	34	50	48
Cases dismissed for lack of jurisdiction	24	28	29	43	34
Complaints investigated	11	10	6	10	13
Cases dismissed as unsupported	7	12	4	5	9
Judges asked to respond in writing to alleged misconduct	1	0	1	0	3
Judges requested to appear to explain alleged misconduct	1	0	0	1	2
Cases dismissed as unsupported after response by judges	0	0	0	0	1
Private admonishments, counseling, and cautionary letters	0	0	0	1	1
Discipline/disability recommended to the Alaska Supreme Court	0	1	0	0	1

Some complaints may include more than one action by the Commission.

*The stages of investigation and dismissal listed here can be found in the Commission Complaint Process Chart found on Page 23.*

# Figure 7

## Actions Taken: 2019 - 2023



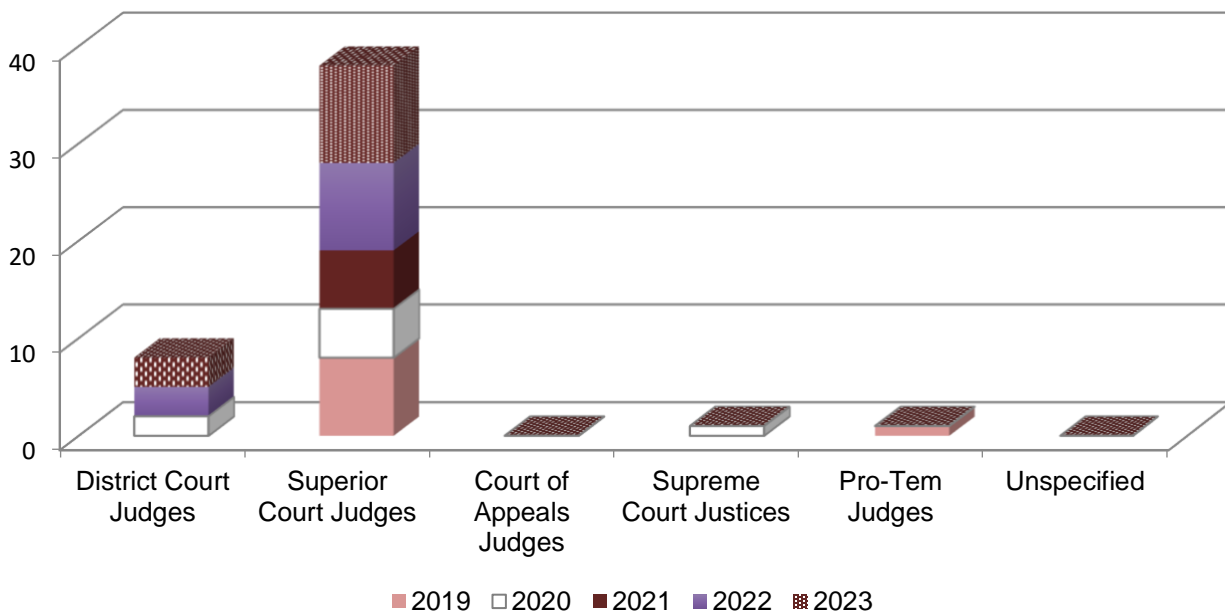
# Table 8

## Court Levels Involved Jurisdictional Complaints 2019 - 2023

Court Levels Involved	2019*	2020*	2021*	2022	2023
District Court Judges	0	2	0	3	3
Superior Court Judges	8	5	6	9	10
Court of Appeals Judges	0	0	0	0	0
Supreme Court Justices	0	1	0	0	0
Pro-Tem Judges	1	0	0	0	0
Unspecified	0	0	0	0	0

\*Not a total of the category. Some complaints include more than one judge/justice.

### Figure 8 Court Levels Involved



# Table 9

## Pending Jurisdictional Complaints by Year Filed

(As of December 31, 2023)

2022	1
2023	9

# Table 10

## Types of Allegations\* Filed in 2023 (Jurisdictional and Non-Jurisdictional)

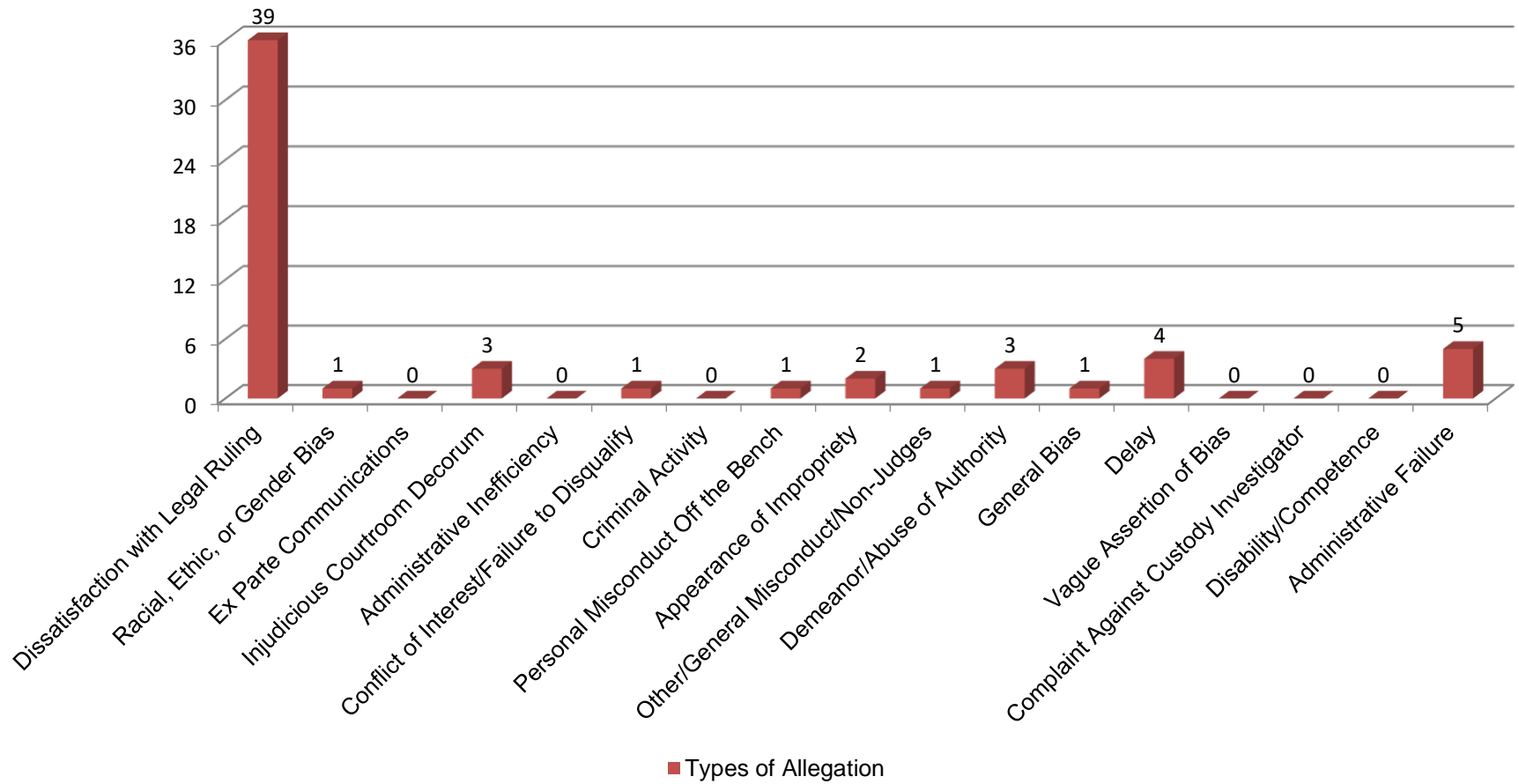
<b>Types of Allegations</b>	<b>2023*</b>
Dissatisfaction with Legal Ruling	39
Racial, Ethnic, or Gender Bias	1
Ex Parte Communications	0
Injudicious Courtroom Decorum	3
Administrative Inefficiency	0
Conflict of Interest/Failure to Disqualify	1
Criminal Activity	0
Personal Misconduct Off the Bench	1
Appearance of Impropriety	2
Other/General Misconduct/Non-Judges	1
Demeanor/Abuse of Authority	3
General Bias	1
Delay	4
Vague Assertion of Bias	0
Complaint Against Custody Investigator	0
Disability/Competence	0
Administrative Failure	5

\*Some complaints include more than one type of allegation

# Figure 10

## Types of Allegations Filed in 2023

(Jurisdictional and Non-Jurisdictional)



# Table 11

## 2023 Recusals by Commissioners and Staff

<b>Total Votes on Complaints in 2023</b>	<b>48</b>
Judge Member Recusals	0
Attorney Member Recusals	2
Public Member Recusals	0
Staff Member Recusals	0



## **B. Commission Meetings**

During 2023, the Commission held three regular meeting, one Formal Hearing, and five Special Meetings on a confidential Commission matter. With a full-time staff of two, the Commission continues to increase its case processing and fine-tune its procedures. Staff consistently works to increase staff responsiveness. Increased responsiveness increases the Commission's accessibility and has resulted in increased interaction with the public. Current funding levels allow for four regular meetings a year in Anchorage.

### **2023 Regular Meeting Locations**

January 6, 2023	Zoom/Anchorage
April 28, 2023	Zoom/Anchorage
September 1, 2023	Zoom/Anchorage

### **2023 Special Meeting Locations**

January 13, 2023	Zoom
January 18, 2023	Zoom
May 9, 2023	Zoom
September 9, 2023	Zoom
December 11, 2023	Zoom

### **2023 Formal Hearing Location**

September 1, 2023	Zoom/Anchorage
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## **C. Outreach**

Commission brochures inform the public of its purpose and functions. Brochures are available to the general public free of charge through the Commission's office. In addition, Commission members and staff address bar associations, court administrators, local community groups, and judicial programs. The Commission also maintains membership in the National Center for State Courts, Center for Judicial Ethics.

## **D. Formal Proceedings**

The Commission held a Formal Hearing and forwarded a recommendation of discipline to the Supreme Court in one matter in 2023.

## **E. Rules of Procedure**

The Commission's operations are governed by its own Rules of Procedure. While the statutes relating to the Commission broadly outline the Commission's responsibilities, the Rules of Procedure define how the Commission operates. In 1991, the Commission revised its rules clarifying many rules and increasing their scope. In 1998, a committee consisting of four commission members, one attorney member, one public member, and two judge members, was established for the purpose of refining and modifying the Rules of Procedure. The Commission adopted this revision on December 1, 2000.

The Rules Revision Committee's work focused on enhancing the rules in the areas such as discovery, evidence, motions, role of the chair, executive director's role and authority, standards for reopening complaints, deliberative process, the formal hearing, and settlement. In June 2003, the Notice Rule was revised to allow notice to a judge in anticipation of action at an upcoming meeting. Rule 5(e) was revised to specify the form that information would be released pursuant to a waiver in 2009. In August 2013, the Commission amended Rule 11 to allow for "informal advice" by the Commission to a judge where there is no misconduct. Most recently, (May 2020) the Commission amended Rule 1 to provide for public notice of formal hearings, and (May 2021) to clarify notice of meetings and the procedure for members of the general public to speak at a Commission meeting.

Most rule revisions are circulated for public comment prior to their adoption. The Commission's efforts are directed toward improving its public responsiveness, creating the fairest procedures, and fulfilling its directive under the state constitution. The Commission's current Rules of Procedure are included in **Appendix I**.

## **F. Staffing**

The Commission staff currently consists of an executive director and an administrative assistant.

## **IV. COMMISSION FINANCES AND BUDGET**

The Commission's finances are planned according to the state fiscal year (July 1 - June 30). Each year the Commission on Judicial Conduct submits its budget request to the legislature. The Commission's resources are appropriated from the state general operating fund.

### **A. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget**

In FY 2024, the legislature appropriated \$493,900.00 to the Commission. This money enables the Commission to operate a staff of one executive director and one administrative assistant.

In addition, in FY 2024, the legislature provided for language appropriation not to exceed \$75,000 to engage Special Counsel if needed.

### **B. Calendar Year 2023 Activity**

All but one of the previous year's pending complaints were closed in 2023.

## **V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

### **A. Commission Meetings**

January 19, 2024	Zoom/Anchorage
May 17, 2024	Zoom/Anchorage
September 2024	Zoom/Anchorage
December 2024	Zoom/Anchorage

### **B. Caseload**

In 2024, the Commission anticipates receiving approximately 60 complaints against judicial officers, of which 15 may require staff investigation.

### **C. Legislation**

At the Commission's request, the House Judiciary Committee introduced a bill in 1989 that opened the Commission's formal hearings to the public. House Bill 268, passed in May

1990, also established a standard deadline of six years for complaints against judges to be filed with the Commission. (The former law required a period of not more than six years before the start of the judge's current term; creating different time limits for different judges.) The law also explicitly includes part-time or temporary judges within the Commission's authority. That law's enactment also made all Commission formal hearings and recommendations to the Alaska Supreme Court open to the public. In 1997, the Commission conducted its first public hearing under this legislation.

## **D. Formal Ethics Opinions**

In 1991, the Commission issued its first Formal Ethics Opinions. These opinions are based on actual Commission complaints that resulted in some form of private informal action. Formal Ethics Opinions are reported in a way that protects confidentiality. Only the minimum facts necessary to an understanding of the opinion are reported. The Commission continues to adopt new formal ethics opinions as situations arise. These opinions are included in **Appendix G**.

## **E. Advisory Opinions**

At the March 1, 1996, meeting, the Commission adopted a rule authorizing the issuance of advisory opinions to judges who would like guidance regarding ethical dilemmas. Special committees of the Commission draft opinions in response to written requests. A final opinion issues from the Commission and is confidential unless the requesting judge asks that it be public. The Commission adopted no new advisory opinions in 2023. Advisory opinions are included in **Appendix H**.

Staff also provided over 160 informal ethics opinions to judicial officers and court personnel.

## **F. Other Activities**

In 2024, the Commission will continue developing and conducting educational programs for judicial officers on various judicial conduct issues. While advisory opinions provide guidance to individual judges addressing specific ethical issues, there is an ongoing need to provide general guidance to all judges in this changing field.

Again in 2023, the Commission provided self-study materials covering a variety of ethics topics for both new and experienced judges. In addition, the Commission continues

to participate with the court system's judicial education committee and presents judicial programs periodically addressing a variety of ethical issues.

In 2000, the Commission jointly published Alaska Judicial Applicant Guidelines with the Alaska Judicial Council and the Alaska Bar Association. The publication gives guidance to judicial applicants and their supporters regarding the ethical considerations when soliciting support from others. There are suggestions for preferred methods and tone of communications as well as an appendix of resource materials. This publication was reprinted in 2003.

Other outreach activities will continue and expand to further general public awareness of the Commission's functions. Staff will continue to address community groups and meet individually with members of the general public. In addition, the Commission will periodically pay for display newspaper advertisements that highlight the Commission's purpose and invite public participation.

The Commission also hopes to continue work with the state and local bar associations to identify areas of concern that attorneys have encountered. A very small percentage of current complaints against judges are filed by attorneys.