



NEW YORK STATE
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Syracuse City Court Judge Should Be Censured for Declining to Perform a Same-Sex Marriage Ceremony

The New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that Judge K. Felicia Pitts-Davis of the Syracuse City Court (Onondaga County) should be censured for declining to officiate a scheduled courthouse marriage ceremony involving a same-sex couple on Saturday November 16, 2024.¹ Judge Pitts-Davis agreed to the censure.

The Commission found that the judge’s refusal to conduct the same-sex marriage constituted “serious misconduct” that “severely undermined public confidence in her impartiality.” However, on the specific facts of this case, censure rather than removal from office was warranted. Among the factors the Commission considered were the following.

- At the time, Judge Pitts-Davis, who had previously conducted two other same-sex marriages, was undergoing “what for her was a profound re-evaluation of

¹ Syracuse City Court assigns judges on a rotating basis to preside on Saturdays over official proceedings, including marriage ceremonies. Any couple may request to be added to the court’s calendar for that purpose.

her religious beliefs on the propriety of same-sex marriages.” (The national governing body of her church is opposed to same-sex marriages, while her local church had not taken a position on the matter.)²

- Judge Pitts-Davis was unnerved by having just learned on November 15 that her brother was terminally ill. (He died two days later.)
- When advised on Friday (November 15) that there were two marriages on the court’s Saturday calendar over which she was scheduled to preside, and that one involved a same-sex couple, Judge Pitts-Davis sought an advisory opinion as to whether she could decline to solemnize the same-sex event. However, it was not possible to receive an opinion so quickly from the Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics.
- Judge Pitts-Davis asked that the same-sex marriage, and if necessary both Saturday marriages, be postponed to another day. Although neither ceremony was ultimately postponed, as another judge agreed to solemnize the same-sex marriage, Judge Pitts-Davis had been advised by court staff that the same-sex ceremony had been rescheduled. She stated that she was unaware that the same-sex couple was even present in the courtroom when she performed the opposite-sex ceremony.
- Judge Pitts-Davis now appreciates it would have been profoundly unfair to both couples for her personal issues to result in a last-minute postponement of their marriage plans and realizes and regrets that her conduct conveyed the appearance that she was biased against same-sex couples and the broader LGBTQIA+ community.
- Although she will ask court staff not to assign her to any future marriages on the court’s calendar, Judge Pitts-Davis also agreed that she would officiate at future same-sex marriages on the court’s calendar if she were on duty and no other judge was available. She agreed to do so in recognition of the rule that a judge’s judicial duties must take precedence over the judge’s other activities. 22 NYCRR 100.3(A).

² In addition to previously officiating two same-sex marriage ceremonies, Judge Pitts-Davis presided over a small claims matter involving an estranged same-sex couple who advised the Commission that the judge was courteous and fair.

- The Commission noted that Judge Pitts-Davis “acknowledged that her conduct was improper” and “has expressed remorse for her inappropriate conduct.”

Judge Pitts-Davis has been a Judge of the Syracuse City Court since 2021. Her current term expires on December 31, 2030.

Statement by Commission Administrator

Commission Administrator Robert H. Tembeckjian made the following statement.

“Once a judge agrees to exercise the discretionary act of solemnizing lawful marriages, the responsibility should be exercised equitably, without discrimination or the appearance of prejudice against certain couples. Regardless of a judge’s personal views, those who choose to be married at the courthouse deserve the unbiased services of the public servants on duty. It is most significant that, despite her personal views and her misconduct in November 2024, and in deference to the mandate that judicial duties come first, Judge Pitts-Davis has pledged to perform same-sex marriages when on duty in the future if no other judge is available.”

The Commission Proceedings

Judge Pitts-Davis was served with a Formal Written Complaint dated July 17, 2025, containing one charge.

On February 23, 2026, the Administrator of the Commission, Judge Pitts-Davis and her attorney entered into an Agreed Statement of Facts, stipulating to the facts and sanction and waiving further submissions and oral argument.

The Commission accepted the Agreed Statement on March 12, 2026.

The Commission Determination

The Commission filed a determination dated March 16, 2026, in which 10 members concurred. One member did not participate.

Court of Appeals Review

The Commission transmitted its determination to the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, pursuant to Judiciary Law Section 44, subdivision 7. The Commission was notified on March 26, 2026, that Judge Pitts-Davis had received the determination. Consequently, the matter is now public.

A judge may either accept the Commission's determination or, within 30 days from receipt, make a written request to the Chief Judge for a review of the determination by the Court of Appeals.

Pursuant to Judiciary Law Section 44, subdivision 7, if Judge Pitts-Davis does not request review by the Court of Appeals, the Commission will censure her in accordance with the determination.

If a Commission determination is reviewed by the Court of Appeals, the Court may accept the determined sanction, impose a different sanction including admonition, censure or removal, or impose no sanction.

Statistics Relating to Prior Determinations

Since 1978, the Commission has issued 361 determinations of censure against judges in New York State. The Commission has issued 186 determinations of removal and 292 determinations of admonition.

The Commission has accepted 163 permanent resignation stipulations, in which the judge has agreed to leave office and never seek or accept judicial office in the future, since the procedure was instituted in 2003.

The Court of Appeals has reviewed 102 Commission determinations. The results are available on the Commission's website at "[Appealed Decisions](#)."

Counsel

Judge Pitts-Davis was represented by Robert F. Julian, 2037 Genesee Street, Utica, New York 13501, (315) 797-5610.

The Commission was represented by Deputy Administrator John J. Postel, Senior Attorney David M. Duguay and Senior Investigator Vanessa Mangan.

Background Information on Judge Pitts-Davis

First Took Office: 2021
 Current Term Expires: December 31, 2030
 Year Admitted to the NYS Bar: 1994

Members of the Commission

The Commission members serve four-year terms. A list of members is noted below.

The Public File

The determination and other records are available on the Commission's website: www.cjc.ny.gov.

MEMBERS OF THE STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Member	Appointing Authority	Term End
Joseph W. Belluck, Esq., Chair	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2028
Taa Grays, Esq., Vice Chair	Senate President Pro Tem Andrea Stewart-Cousins	March 31, 2027
Hon. Fernando M. Camacho	Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson	March 31, 2028
Stefano Cambareri, Esq.	Assembly Minority Leader William A. Barclay	March 31, 2029
Brian C. Doyle, Esq.	Senate Minority Leader Robert G. Ort	March 31, 2028
Hon. John A. Falk	Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson	March 31, 2029
Hon. David Fried	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2030
Robin Chappelle Golston	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2029
Nina M. Moore, Ph.D.	Governor Kathy Hochul	March 31, 2027
Hon. Peter H. Moulton	Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson	March 31, 2030
Marvin Ray Raskin, Esq.	Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie	March 31, 2030