



NEW YORK STATE
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Town Justice in Herkimer County Should Be Removed for Failing to Maintain Professional Competence in the Law

The New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct has determined that John M. Skinner, a Justice of the Columbia Town Court, Herkimer County, should be removed from office for failing to appreciate fundamental legal precepts and otherwise failing to maintain professional competence in the law.

The Commission found that Judge Skinner:

- Conducted unauthorized *ex parte* communications with defendants in multiple cases, including criminal and traffic matters;
- Dismissed charges in multiple cases without the necessary notice to or consent of the prosecution;
- Summoned a complaining witness to court after dismissing the case, without any legal authority to do so;
- Accepted a guilty plea from a defendant who spoke limited English, after an improper *ex parte* conversation and without an interpreter present;
- Failed to mechanically record proceedings as required; and
- Did not understand the role of a judge, various statutory obligations and due process.

Prior Censure

In 2018, the Commission [censured](#) Judge Skinner for delaying and improperly handling a small claims action and failing to mechanically record any court proceedings for more than eight years.

In its removal decision, the Commission stated that “[The Judge’s] array of misconduct, particularly in light of his prior censure, demonstrates that he is unfit for judicial office and warrants his removal to prevent his return to the bench.”

Judge Skinner, who is not an attorney, had served as a Justice of the Columbia Town Court since 2009. The judge retired from judicial office on December 31, 2025.¹ His term would have expired on December 31, 2028.

Statement by Commission Administrator

Commission Administrator Robert H. Tembeckjian made the following statement.

“For the public to have confidence in a court, the judge must understand and adhere to the law. Mistakes made in good faith are appealable. But there is no room on the bench for judges who disregard or do not understand fundamental legal principles and procedures.”

The Commission Proceedings

Judge Skinner was served with a Formal Written Complaint dated August 27, 2025, containing three charges. He did not file an Answer.

By motion dated December 2, 2025, the Administrator moved for summary determination. The judge did not submit a response. The motion was granted on January 29, 2026, determining that the factual allegations of the Complaint were sustained and that the judge’s misconduct was established.

¹ Section 47 of the Judiciary Law allows the Commission to seek removal within 120 days of a judge’s resignation. Additionally, a judge who is removed from office by the Court of Appeals becomes permanently ineligible to hold any judicial office in New York State.

The Commission Determination

The Commission filed a determination dated February 17, 2026, in which 10 members concurred.²

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. Judge Skinner received it on April 15, 2026, and the Commission was subsequently notified by the Court of Appeals that service was complete. 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 Skinner does not request review by the Court of Appeals, the Court of Appeals will remove him 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 188 determinations of removal against judges in New York State. The Commission has issued 361 determinations of censure 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](#)." One request for review is currently pending.

² Judge David Fried joined the Commission on March 3, 2026, and did not participate in this matter.

Counsel

In the proceedings before the Commission, Judge Skinner represented himself.

The Commission was represented by Deputy Administrator Cathleen S. Cenci, Senior Attorney Kathleen E. Klein and Principal Investigator Ryan Fitzpatrick.

Background Information on Judge Skinner

First Took Office: 2009
Current Term Expires: December 31, 2028

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