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BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

IN RE THE MATTER OF)
The Honorable John G. Ritchie) No. 91-1110-F-33
) STATEMENT OF CHARGES
)
)

This Statement of Charges is filed alleging various violations by The Honorable John G. Ritchie of the Rules of Judicial Conduct pursuant to authority granted in RCW 2.64 and Washington Administrative Code Chapter 292, and at the order of the Commission on Judicial Conduct. The background and facts relating to the charges are set forth in the following paragraphs.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Honorable John G. Ritchie, Respondent herein, is now and was at all times discussed herein a Judge of the King County District Court.

2. On February 19, 1992, Judge Ritchie was sent a letter from the Commission on Judicial Conduct informing him that a Verified Statement was filed in accordance with WAC 292-12-010(4) and that the Commission was pursuing initial proceedings. A Statement of Allegations was included with the letter. On

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1 August 18, 1992, an Amended Statement of Allegations was sent to
2 Judge Ritchie.

3 II. FACTS SUPPORTING CHARGES

4 3. Improper Claims for Travel Reimbursement. For each
5 of the years 1986 through 1991 Judge Ritchie signed and submitted
6 travel vouchers for reimbursement in connection with trips taken
7 by him allegedly in furtherance of the business of the King County
8 District Court. During the years in question, he made one trip to
9 Montego Bay, Jamaica, four trips to Florida and one trip to
10 Phoenix, Arizona. As detailed below, the vouchers submitted by
11 Judge Ritchie in connection with the trips contain numerous false
12 and/or highly misleading statements concerning the nature, purpose
13 and duration of the Court-related business allegedly conducted
14 during the trips.

15 a. 1986 Trip to Montego Bay, Jamaica.

16 On December 16, 1986, Judge Ritchie submitted a voucher
17 for expenses incurred with attendance at a California Trial
18 Lawyers Association seminar in Montego Bay, Jamaica. See Exhibit
19 A. According to the voucher, the seminar began on December 3,
20 1986, and concluded on December 9, 1986. In fact, meetings were
21 held only on December 2, 3, 4 and 5. See Exhibit A-1. No other
22 judge from the state of Washington attended. Based on the
23 voucher, Judge Ritchie was reimbursed for his air fare and
24 lodging.

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b. 1987 Trip to Florida.

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2 On November 16, 1987, Judge Ritchie submitted a voucher
3 for expenses allegedly incurred in connection with attendance at a
4 Florida Bar Association CLE entitled Appellate Practice for the
5 General Practitioner. According to the voucher signed by Judge
6 Ritchie, the seminar began on October 14, 1987, and ended on
7 October 20, 1987. See Ex. B. In fact, the CLE lasted one day.

8 Judge Ritchie was in Florida for a total of two weeks in
9 connection with the trip. He claimed and received reimbursement
10 for his entire air fare (\$309), lodging for approximately four
11 days at the Sun Spot Vacation Apartments, and rental car expenses
12 for the entire two week period.

13 c. 1988 Trip to Florida.

14 On November 14, 1988, Judge Ritchie submitted a travel
15 voucher seeking reimbursement for attendance at an alleged
16 "Florida Bar Association Conference" which, according to the
17 voucher, began on October 5, 1988, and ended on October 17, 1988.
18 See Exhibit C. Contrary to the representations in the voucher,
19 there was no such conference. Although Judge Ritchie had
20 originally registered for a one day Florida Bar Association CLE on
21 sexual harassment to be held sometime during the period in
22 question, he was notified, approximately two months in advance of
23 the scheduled date of the CLE, that it had been canceled.
24 Notwithstanding, he took the trip and billed King County for
25 various expenses.

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1 Even though the CLE was canceled, Judge Ritchie
2 submitted materials which made it appear that he had in fact
3 attended a CLE. For example, in the materials he submitted
4 supporting the claimed expenses Judge Ritchie wrote the following:

5 The following are expenses incurred by myself
6 relating to the conference and study in St.
7 Petersburg, Florida.

8

9 1988 Travel Voucher (Ex. C at 2) (emphasis added).

10 Judge Ritchie sought and received reimbursement for his
11 entire air fare, lodging for approximately five days at the Sun
12 Spot Vacation Apartments, and his rental car bill for the entire
13 twelve days he was in Florida.

14 d. 1989 Trip to Florida.

15 On December 5, 1989, Judge Ritchie submitted a voucher
16 seeking reimbursement for a trip to Florida in connection with a
17 purported meeting relating to the "Florida Courts of Limited
18 Jurisdiction." See Ex. D. There was, however, no formal
19 conference or meeting sponsored by any organization relating to
20 the "Florida Courts of Limited Jurisdiction." Judge Ritchie
21 claimed reimbursement for his entire air fare and lodging for
22 approximately six days at the Sun Spot Vacation Apartments.

23 e. 1990 Trip to Florida.

24 On August 23, 1990, Judge Ritchie submitted a voucher
25 for attendance at a "Florida Judicial Conference" which allegedly
26 began on May 23, 1990, and ended on June 5, 1990. See Ex. E.

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1 There was, however, no such conference sponsored by any
2 organization. In the supporting materials submitted by Judge
3 Ritchie in connection with the voucher, he wrote a memo to the
4 Seattle District Court Administrator stating, in part, as follows:

5 The following are the expenses from the
6 conference.

7

8 1990 Travel Voucher (Ex. E at 4) (emphasis added).

9 He also submitted a copy of a canceled check to a travel
10 agency which falsely stated that the purpose of the check was to
11 pay for travel to a "conference CLE." Id. at 2.

12 Judge Ritchie sought and received reimbursement for his
13 entire air fare, lodging for approximately eleven days at the Sun
14 Spot Vacation Apartments, and the entire rental car bill.

15 f. Trip to Arizona.

16 On November 4, 1991, Judge Ritchie submitted a travel
17 voucher seeking reimbursement for travel to Phoenix, Arizona, from
18 October 8, 1991, through October 29, 1991. See Exhibit F. While
19 in Phoenix, he stayed at a condominium he owns. According to the
20 voucher, the purpose of the trip was for a "conference" on "law
21 related education." There was no such conference. Judge Ritchie
22 requested and received reimbursement for his entire air fare, and
23 one-half of the total rental car charge for the period he was in
24 Phoenix.

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1 4. Improper Use of King County Phones for Personal Long
2 Distance Calls. From at least as early as 1989 and continuing
3 thereafter, Judge Ritchie used the telephone in his chambers to
4 make numerous long distance phone calls for personal matters not
5 related to the business of the Court. See Exhibit G. The phone
6 was used, for example, to make calls to the Maricopa County
7 Treasurer's office in Phoenix, Arizona, where Judge Ritchie owns
8 property, as well as to various real estate firms in Arizona and
9 Florida (where Judge Ritchie also owns property). Id. Judge
10 Ritchie did not reimburse King County for these calls during the
11 period they were made. After he became aware that his use of the
12 phones for personal business was a matter under review by the
13 Commission, he reimbursed the County for a portion of the calls.

14 5. Improper Use of Postage Stamps Supplied by King
15 County. From the period January 1991 through February 1992, Judge
16 Ritchie requested and received \$850 in postage stamps from King
17 County. See Exhibit H at 1-6. As of March 16, 1992, he had only
18 \$332 of these postage stamps left. See Exhibit H at 7. By
19 subpoena duces tecum issued under the authority of the Commission,
20 Judge Ritchie was ordered to produce copies of any log or other
21 record of outgoing correspondence sent in his official capacity
22 during this time period. These records were sought to determine
23 whether the volume of outgoing court-related correspondence was
24 consistent with the extremely high number of stamps used by Judge
25 Ritchie. No such record was produced, and Judge Ritchie has been

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1 unable to provide copies of official correspondence which would
2 account for the high volume of stamps used by him during the
3 period in question.

4 **III. BASIS FOR COMMISSION ACTION**

5 6. The Commission has determined that probable cause
6 exists for believing that the Respondent has violated Canons 1 and
7 2(A) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which state:

8 **Code of Judicial Conduct:**

9 **CANON 1**

10 **A Judge Should Uphold the Integrity and
Independence of the Judiciary**

11 An independent and honorable judiciary is
12 indispensable to justice in our society. A
13 judge should participate in establishing,
14 maintaining, and enforcing, and should himself
15 observe, high standards of conduct so that the
16 integrity and independence of the judiciary
17 may be preserved. The provisions of this Code
18 should be construed and applied to further
19 that objective.

20 **CANON 2**

21 **A Judge Should Avoid Impropriety and
the Appearance of Impropriety in
All His Activities**

22 A. A judge should respect and comply
23 with the law and should conduct himself at all
24 times in a manner that promotes public
25 confidence in the integrity and impartiality
26 of the judiciary.

IV. NOTIFICATION OF RIGHT TO FILE A WRITTEN ANSWER

7. In accordance with WAC 292-12-030(5), the Respondent
is herewith informed that a written answer may be filed with the
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1 Commission to the charges contained in the Statement of Charges
2 within twenty-one days after the date of service. If Respondent
3 does not file a written Answer, a general denial will be entered
4 on his behalf. The Statement of Charges and Answer shall be the
5 only pleadings required.

6 DATED this 16th day of September, 1992.

7 COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT
8 OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

9 By David Akana
10 David Akana
11 Executive Director
12 P. O. Box 1817
13 Olympia, WA 98507

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