



STATE OF TENNESSEE BOARD OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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August 4, 2026

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FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

Judge William K. Lane, III
105 East 4th Avenue
Hohenwald, TN 38462

RE: Public Reprimand
File No. BJC-2026-07-26

Dear Judge Lane:

This letter shall serve as a public reprimand pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated section 17-5-303(e)(2)(B)(i)(c).

On August 22, 2025, you were appointed to the bench as a full-time circuit court judge for the 32nd Judicial District. As such, you were required to cease practicing law no later than February 18, 2026. *See* Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 10, RJC 3.10 (permitting newly appointed or elected judges to practice law “only in an effort to wind up his or her practice, ceasing to practice as soon as reasonably possible and *in no event longer than 180 days after assuming office.*”) (emphasis added). *See also* Tenn. Code Ann. § 17-1-105 (prohibiting judges and chancellors from practicing law). The 180-day limitation is a “bright-line rule.” RJC 3.10, cmt. 2. The rule is “unambiguous and absolute” and, as such, “means what it says.” *State v. Lipford*, 67 S.W.3d 79, 83 (Tenn. Crim. App. 2001).

After you were required to cease practicing law, you appeared in court as defense counsel in a case involving claims for breach of contract, breach of warranty, and fraud. You appeared on behalf of the defendant on June 18, 2026, prepared to try the case but it was reset to June 29, 2026. You then appeared on that date and tried the case. Both court appearances were well beyond the time permitted by RJC 3.10.

In a response submitted July 17, 2026, you acknowledged violating RJC 3.10 by appearing in court as an attorney and trying a case. You explained that although you were aware of your ethical obligation to cease practicing law, you “made the decision to see the matter through” rather than risk a possible adverse result for your client.

In an unrelated matter, you filed a document on June 25, 2026, asking a court to close an estate. You signed the document as "Attorney for Estate," well beyond the 180-day window to cease practicing law.

Blurring the boundaries between being a full-time judge and being an attorney creates awkwardness and uncertainty for those participating in legal proceedings, including the attorneys, litigants, judges, and judicial system personnel. Moreover, from a litigant's perspective, the appearance by one judge as an advocate in the court of another judge may foster an appearance of favoritism among colleagues. Conversely, judges who do not have their time, attention, and responsibilities divided by dual roles are able to devote themselves fully to their judicial duties and avoid such issues. In recognition that the proper administration of justice and public confidence in the judiciary requires maintaining clear boundaries between jurist and advocate, all states have restrictions on judges practicing law. As to full-time judges in particular, these restrictions tend to be absolute and are strictly enforced. *See* Deirdre M. Smith, *Judges as Lawyers*, 37 Geo. J. Legal Ethics 277 (2024).

As you have acknowledged, trying a case as counsel for a party and signing and submitting documents to a court as an attorney beyond the 180-day limit runs afoul of RJC 3.10. The investigative panel decided to impose a public reprimand for this conduct, which you have accepted. In imposing this sanction, the panel considered that you have taken full responsibility for your conduct and have fully cooperated with disciplinary counsel throughout this matter.

The Board trusts that the reprimand imposed today will result in an elevated consciousness regarding your ethical responsibilities and that you will avoid any conduct going forward inconsistent with your ethical obligations as a member of the judiciary.

Sincerely,
Tony A. Childress
Chancellor Tony A. Childress
Board Chair