

BEFORE THE FLORIDA JUDICIAL QUALIFICATIONS COMMISSION
STATE OF FLORIDA

SC13-1333

INQUIRY CONCERNING A JUDGE No. 12-613

LAURA M. WATSON

**Judge Watson’s Motion to Stay JQC Proceedings
and Briefing, and/or Motion for Extension of Time**

Appellant, the Honorable Laura M. Watson (hereinafter “Judge Watson”) hereby requests that this Honorable Court stay the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission (hereinafter “JQC”) proceedings against her and briefing therein pending the final disposition of the Petition she filed in the Florida Supreme Court, *and* the Appeals she is filing in the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, both of which are directed towards the JQC’s proceedings, and may impact these proceedings and briefing significantly, as detailed *infra*. Additionally, Judge Watson requests an extension of time to respond to the Show Cause Order, dated April 17, 2014.

On April 11, 2014, Judge Watson filed in the Florida Supreme Court, in Case No. SC14-749, her Original Petition for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief against the JQC, and its hearing panel chair, executive director, and special counsel. (hereinafter “SC Petition”). The issues raised in such Petition are

intricately related and germane to the issues in the JQC proceedings against Judge Watson, and could significantly alter those proceedings and outcome therein.

On February 7, 2014, Judge Watson filed in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, in Case No. 0:14-cv-60306-MCG, her Complaint against the JQC and its chairs, counsel, executive director, and members seeking declaratory and injunctive relief, and tort damages, for the JQC's lack of jurisdiction, and violation of her rights including Due Process (hereinafter "S.D. Case"). Judge Watson's injunctive relief motion was denied, and her case dismissed, but Judge Watson appealed both of those orders to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. The injunctive relief order is the subject of 11th Circuit Court of Appeals No. 14-11021, but the dismissal order appeal has not been docketed yet. Hereinafter, such Appeals will be referred to collectively as "11th Cir. Appeals".

Subsequent to the filing of the SC Petition and the 11th Cir. Appeals, the JQC issued its Hearing Panel Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of the removal of Judge Watson (hereinafter "JQC Recommendations"), and the Florida Supreme Court entered its Show Cause Order for Judge Watson to respond by May 7, 2014 (hereinafter "Show Cause Order").

Judge Watson has already suffered the irreparable harm of damage to her reputation, as detailed in her motion and complaint in the S.D. Case, *but also* now

suffers the threat of imminent irreparable harm of loss of her constitutional property rights in her judicial office. Both the SC Petition, and the 11th Cir. Appeals are directed at these harms, and the outcome of such proceedings could significantly alter the JQC proceedings, briefings, and final outcome as well.

Currently, Judge Watson is working on a briefing deadline in the 11th Cir. Appeals of April 28, 2014, which only provides her an additional nine (9) days to respond to this Court's Show Cause Order. The JQC Recommendations address three (3) days of proceedings, consist of over forty (40) pages of detailed findings and conclusions, and threatens the loss of Judge Watson's constitutional property rights in her judicial office.

Considering the severity of the punishment recommended, i.e., removal from office, the length of the proceedings, matters of judicial economy, the interests of administration of justice; due process; and Judge Watson's constitutional and property rights; Judge Watson requests:

- i. a stay of the JQC proceedings against her and briefing therein, and
- ii. a forty five (45 day) extension of time to respond to the Show Cause Order.

Without the relief requested, Judge Watson will be further irreparably harmed and prejudiced. The JQC Recommendations have been reported in the local and national media, and further damaged Judge Watson's good reputation.

Judge Watson is working on two (2) simultaneous briefing deadlines directed to the JQC proceedings, and will have a third briefing deadline once the second appeal to the 11th Circuit is docketed. Most importantly, without a thorough examination and final determination of the issues presented in the SC Petition and/or 11th Cir. Appeals, Judge Watson could be further irreparably harmed by the unconstitutional deprivation of her judicial office, without due process based on the unconstitutional operation of the JQC and/or its improper motives and biases asserted therein such pending proceedings.

Judge Watson's co-counsel consulted with opposing counsel regarding the motion for stay and extension of time requesting a forty five (45) day extension until after the Stay is lifted to respond to the Show Cause Order or, in the alternative, if the Stay is denied, an extension of forty five (45) days from the original response date of May 7, 2014, through and including June 21, 2014, and he is opposed to such motion.

However, there is no detriment to a stay and extension of time since the JQC's *allegations* to which their Recommendations are directed are so remote in time, and not directed to Judge Watson's judicial conduct. Such *allegations* are directed to conduct that occurred nearly a decade ago before Judge Watson ever considered being a judge, and pre-date a rule change on settlement

communications that the JQC seeks to enforce.

Granting Judge Watson's motion for a stay and motion for extension of time promote judicial economy without the expense of any prejudice to the parties, and thereby prevent additional harm to Judge Watson.

Conclusion

In the interest of judicial economy, administration of justice, due process, and protection of Judge Watson, this Honorable Court should grant this motion for a stay and extension of time granting a forty five (45) day extension until after the Stay is lifted to respond to the Show Cause Order or, in the alternative, if the Stay is denied, an extension of forty five (45) days from the original response date of May 7, 2014, through and including June 21, 2014.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honorable Laura M. Watson
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/s/ Laura M. Watson
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Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a true and correct copy of the foregoing was furnished via the E-Filing Portal by e-mail on this 23rd day of April, 2014 to: Miles A. McGrane, III, Esquire, The McGrane Law Firm, Special Co-Counsel, 2103 Country Club Prado, Coral Gables, Florida 33134 (Email: miles@mcgranelaw.com, lisa@mcgranelaw.com); Ruben V. Chavez, Esquire, Law Offices of Ruben V. Chavez, P.A., Special Co-Counsel 9100 S. Dadeland Blvd, Suite 1510, Miami, Florida 33156 (Email: rchavez@chavezpa.com) Lauri Waldman Ross, Esquire, Counsel to the Hearing Panel of the JQC, Ross & Girten, 9130 South Dadeland Boulevard, Suite 1612, Miami, Florida 33156 (Email: RossGirten@Laurilaw.com, Susie@Laurilaw.com); Michael L. Schneider, Esquire, General Counsel to the JQC, 1110 Thomasville Road, Tallahassee, Florida 32303 (Email: mschneider@floridajqc.com); Henry M. Coxe, III, Esquire,

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Pursuant to FJQCR Rule 10(b) a copy is furnished by e-mail to: The Honorable Kerry I. Evander, evanderk@flcourts.org, Chair of the JQC, 300 S. Beach Street, Daytona Beach, Florida 32114.

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