



September 21, 2022
Contact: City Attorney, Kevin Davidson

For immediate release:

We have recently learned of concerning issues with regard to the Kaukauna municipal court judge Carley Windorff and conduct which may undermine the public's confidence in the integrity of our court and our ability to fairly and judiciously enforce those provisions of our Municipal Code protecting the welfare and well-being of our citizens, businesses, property owners, and visitors.

Two issues have come to light in violation of the Wisconsin Supreme Court ethics rules applicable to judges, and the City and other authorities are addressing these issues and what actions need to be undertaken to restore confidence in our judiciary.

In July of this year, Windorff appointed an immediate family member to temporarily fill the municipal court clerk position. She did not disclose to the Kaukauna Human Resources Director that the appointment was her sister. While the City of Kaukauna has a nepotism policy, more importantly, the hiring of an immediate family member is prohibited by the Wisconsin Supreme Court Code of Judicial Conduct – ethics rules applicable to all judges in the State.

On September 14, 2022, judge Windorff publicly posted to Facebook an inappropriate message containing explicit language that demeans and disparages authority, the judiciary, law enforcement and government, and undermines public confidence that Windorff may be an impartial jurist. This conduct violates several additional provisions of the Wisconsin Supreme Court Code of Judicial Conduct.

The City Attorney's Office, Mayor Penterman, and the Kaukauna Common Council unanimously denounce the posting as not reflective of the attitudes or sentiment of City leadership, and unbecoming of the office of the Municipal Judge. We agree with the Wisconsin Supreme Court comment that "Public confidence in the judiciary is eroded by irresponsible or improper conduct of judges," and we believe the public Facebook statement was an insult to all of us as civic leaders, to our men and women in law enforcement, and to the citizens of Kaukauna. We respect and honor the judicial office as a public trust and a highly visible symbol of government under the rule of law.

Statutes and Code do not provide us with a direct mechanism to suspend operation of the Municipal Court or to directly remove the judge for misconduct, but we are here to assure the public that we are taking those steps available to remove risk of prejudicial handling of municipal code enforcements. We have referred this conduct to the Wisconsin Judicial Commission for review and further investigation.

As we await further direction from the Judicial Commission, we will divert all matters otherwise coming before the court for alternative disposition, and my office will be removing active cases to an alternate jurisdiction pending further notice. Questions may be directed to the Kaukauna City Attorney's Office.

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