

Judicial Conduct Board
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Melissa L. Norton, Chief Counsel
717-234-7911

Press Release

Thursday, January 8, 2026

FROM: **Melissa L. Norton**
Chief Counsel

SUBJECT: **Magisterial District Judge Amy L. Zanelli**
Magisterial District Court 31-1-06
31st Judicial District
Lehigh County
1 JD 2026

HARRISBURG, PA - On January 7, 2026, the Judicial Conduct Board filed formal charges in the Court of Judicial Discipline against Lehigh County Magisterial District Judge Amy L. Zanelli. The Board Complaint alleges violations of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges.

Under the Pennsylvania Constitution, Judge Zanelli, as the subject of the charges, is presumed innocent in all proceedings before the Court of Judicial Discipline. The Board has the burden of proving the charges filed in the Court of Judicial Discipline by clear and convincing evidence.

In accordance with the rules which govern proceedings before the Court of Judicial Discipline, Judge Zanelli has the right to respond to the charges, to obtain and inspect the evidence which forms the basis of the allegations, and to a public trial before the Court of Judicial Discipline.

Upon completion of the trial, if the Court determines that any of the charges have been proven by clear and convincing evidence, it will schedule a hearing to determine what sanction, if any, should be imposed. Possible sanctions include censure, suspension, fine or removal from office.

The Board Complaint accompanies this press release. The documents are also available on the Board's website at www.jcbpa.org (select the Resource Tab then select Press Releases in the drop-down menu).

Court filings for all cases prosecuted by the Board are available on the Court of Judicial Discipline website at <http://www.pacourts.us/courts/court-of-judicial-discipline>.

Counsel:

Representing the Judicial Conduct Board: James P. Kleman, Jr., Deputy Chief Counsel

Representing Magisterial District Judge Amy L. Zanelli: Samuel C. Stretton, Esquire

Contact: Melissa L. Norton, Chief Counsel

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
COURT OF JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE

RECEIVED AND FILED

IN RE:

Amy L. Zanelli
Magisterial District Judge
Magisterial District Court 31-1-06
Lehigh County

1 JD 2026

COURT OF JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE
OF PENNSYLVANIA

TO: **AMY L. ZANELLI**

You are hereby notified that the Pennsylvania Judicial Conduct Board has determined that there is probable cause to file formal charges against you for conduct proscribed by the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges. The Board's counsel will present the case in support of the charges before the Pennsylvania Court of Judicial Discipline.

You have an absolute right to be represented by a lawyer in all proceedings before the Court of Judicial Discipline. Your attorney should file an entry of appearance with the Court of Judicial Discipline within fifteen (15) days of service of this Board Complaint in accordance with C.J.D.R.P. No. 110.

You are hereby notified, pursuant to C.J.D.R.P. No. 302(B), that should you elect to file an omnibus motion, that motion should be filed no later than thirty (30) days after the service of this Complaint in accordance with C.J.D.R.P. No. 411.

You are further hereby notified that within thirty (30) days after the service of this Complaint, if no omnibus motion is filed, or within twenty (20) days after the dismissal of all or part of the omnibus motion, you may file an

Answer admitting or denying the allegations contained in this Complaint in accordance with C.J.D.R.P. No. 413. Failure to file an Answer shall be deemed a denial of all factual allegations in the Complaint.

**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
COURT OF JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE**

IN RE:

Amy L. Zanelli Magisterial District Judge Magisterial District Court 31-1-06 Lehigh County	:	1 JD 2026
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COMPLAINT

AND NOW, this 7th day of January, 2026, comes the Judicial Conduct Board of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Board) and files this Board Complaint against Magisterial District Judge Amy L. Zanelli, Magisterial District Court 31-1-06, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, alleging that MDJ Zanelli has violated the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges, as more specifically delineated herein.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

1. Article V, § 18 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania grants to the Board the authority to determine whether probable cause exists to file formal charges against a judicial officer in this Court, and thereafter, to prosecute the case in support of such charges in this Court.
2. From approximately January 3, 2022 until the present, MDJ Zanelli has served continuously as the duly elected Magisterial District Judge of Magisterial District Court 31-1-06, Lehigh County.
3. Pursuant to Article V, § 18(a)(7) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Board determined that probable cause exists to file formal charges against MDJ Zanelli in this Court.

Part I - "Book of Grudges" and Inappropriate Desk Calendar:

4. MDJ Zanelli possessed what she termed a "Book of Grudges" in her office, which had the appearance of an ancient leatherbound tome with papyrus pages.
5. The "Book of Grudges" bore an inscription, written by MDJ Zanelli, dated November 22, 2023, which stated, "Upon this day, we shall begin to record within our Book of Grudges."
6. Following the inscription, MDJ Zanelli made notes in the "Book of Grudges," some of which were decipherable and some which were not decipherable.
7. Of the notes that were decipherable, MDJ Zanelli described a local attorney as "Just a Dick," and she made notes that were critical of another person who appeared before her in landlord-tenant matters.
8. MDJ Zanelli encouraged her staff to make additions to the notes in the "Book of Grudges," about persons doing business in MDJ Zanelli's court with whom they had issues, but they did not do so.
9. MDJ Zanelli placed the "Book of Grudges" in a general work area in the office accessible to all staff for them to add notations to it to it, if they wished.
10. MDJ Zanelli removed the Book of Grudges from her office at some point in early 2024.
11. MDJ Zanelli also possessed a desk calendar that she brought into her office following her election that, among other things, contained explicit sexual messages on varying topics, evidently intended to be humorous, such as "Bedroom Plants He'll Have to Slice Through With a Machete If He Wants That Pussy."

12. MDJ Zanelli displayed this sexually-explicit calendar in a general work area in the office.
13. After MDJ Zanelli became aware that her staff complained to the former office manager about the calendar and its contents, MDJ Zanelli removed the calendar from the office at some point in 2022.

Part II - Improper Demeanor:

14. MDJ Zanelli exhibited improper demeanor toward the defendant in the matter of ***Commonwealth v. Bruce Jackson***, MJ-31106-NT-92-2022.
 - a. The defendant, who was unrepresented, murmured under his breath while the victim/witness testified at the ***Jackson*** trial.
 - b. In a loud voice, MDJ Zanelli directed the defendant to leave the courtroom and to wait in the hallway.
 - c. MDJ Zanelli then carried the chair in which the defendant was sitting into the hallway and told him to sit there until the victim stopped testifying.
 - d. The defendant asked MDJ Zanelli how he was supposed to hear the proceedings.
 - e. MDJ Zanelli told the defendant that he would be able to hear from the hallway.
 - f. MDJ Zanelli then shut the door to the courtroom.
 - g. After the victim finished testifying, MDJ Zanelli permitted the defendant back into the courtroom.
 - h. MDJ Zanelli did not allow the defendant the opportunity to cross-examine the victim.

- i. MDJ Zanelli only allowed the defendant to assert that the case should be dismissed because he and the victim were dating again.
- j. Thereafter, MDJ Zanelli found the defendant guilty.

15. In April 2022, MDJ Zanelli exhibited poor demeanor to a county court employee identified herein as A.M.

- a. While MDJ Zanelli presided at central court, A.M. attempted to whisper a correction to MDJ Zanelli regarding a statement she made in court about a defendant's sentence.
- b. MDJ Zanelli ignored A.M.
- c. A.M. then attempted to get MDJ Zanelli's attention a second time.
- d. After her second attempt, MDJ Zanelli turned and stated to A.M., "I am the judge, and you are just a fucking secretary! I will decide and make the determination about what happens in this courtroom!"

16. On a second occasion with A.M. in September 2022, following a discussion regarding a Mental Illness Substance Abuse (MISA) designation as a bail condition for a defendant, A.M. asked MDJ Zanelli if she wanted the MISA designation added to the defendant's bail conditions.

- a. In response, MDJ Zanelli slammed her hands on the bench and yelled, "Did I stutter?"

17. In conversation with her own court staff and before other court personnel, MDJ Zanelli habitually used profanity, such as the term "cuntrageous," a cacophemism combining the word "cunt" and "outrageous."

18. MDJ Zanelli's use of profanity in court office settings offended the individuals who heard it.

Part III - Lateness and Absences:

19. After taking office, MDJ Zanelli was habitually approximately 20 to 30 minutes late for court proceedings scheduled by her staff to begin at 9:00 a.m.
20. MDJ Zanelli was also habitually 20 to 30 minutes late for court proceedings scheduled to begin after breaks in the daily court schedule made to accommodate her personal appointments.
21. MDJ Zanelli was also habitually absent from court on days that would otherwise constitute normal judicial business hours, *i.e.*, she did not typically appear in the office on Fridays that are not scheduled holidays; she "called off" of work immediately prior to the beginning of the scheduled court day at 9:00 a.m.; and she was absent from the office for approximately two weeks during each of the summer months of June, July, and August.
22. MDJ Zanelli was also frequently unavailable for emergent court business when she served as the after-hours "on call" magisterial district judge in Lehigh County.
23. MDJ Zanelli's habitual lateness, compounded by her preferred absences from court, has caused extreme inconvenience and extra work for her judicial staff in that they were required to reschedule hearings and to notify parties of the rescheduled hearings.
24. MDJ Zanelli's office staff also was subjected to having to field complaints from the public regarding the delays in court business caused by MDJ Zanelli's lateness and absences.

25. MDJ Zanelli's preferred absences and habitual lateness have resulted in scheduling backlogs in her office.

Part IV - Surgery Absence and Pa.R.J.A. 704 Report Issue:

26. MDJ Zanelli was absent from her court office from approximately February 7, 2024, until approximately March 8, 2024, as the result of bone fractures sustained in an accident and the ensuing surgery to correct the injury.

27. MDJ Zanelli conducted preliminary hearings and arraignments from her home by Zoom during this time.

a. MDJ Zanelli did not have permission from the President Judge of Lehigh County to engage in these remote hearings.

28. MDJ Zanelli did not, at any point following the conclusion of her absence, file a Pa.R.J.A. 704 report form despite being directed to do so in writing by the President Judge of Lehigh County and by the State Court Administrator.

29. An advisor to MDJ Zanelli, who drafted a March 18, 2024 email response to the State Court Administrator's correspondence to MDJ Zanelli directing her to file a Pa.R.J.A. 704 report, stated the following incorrect factual assertions in order to advance the claim that MDJ Zanelli's absence was permitted and that the filing of a Pa.R.J.A. 704 report was unnecessary:

a. MDJ Zanelli sought only a "short accommodation" from Lehigh County Magisterial District Court Administrator Carolynn Perry to conduct remote hearings during her convalescence;

b. President Judge Brian Johnson previously advised MDJ Zanelli at a Lehigh County MDJ meeting that such an accommodation was possible;

- c. Ms. Perry arranged for a county laptop and equipment necessary for MDJ Zanelli to conduct remote hearings;
- d. Ms. Perry advised MDJ Zanelli that, if she were going to be out longer than three weeks, she was to let Ms. Perry know;
- e. Ms. Perry provided MDJ Zanelli a remote waiver hearing form to assist her with conducting the remote hearings;
- f. MDJ Zanelli conducted all civil and summary trials remotely with the approval of Ms. Perry.

30. MDJ Zanelli was carbon copied her advisor's email to the State Court Administrator to her personal email account.

31. MDJ Zanelli did not correct any of the factual errors made by her advisor in his email to the State Court Administrator.

32. MDJ Zanelli did not file the Pa.R.J.A. 704 form even after this email exchange, though directed to do so by the President Judge of Lehigh County and by the State Court Administrator.

CHARGES

Counts 1(a)and 1(b) and Count 2 – Violation of Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B) and Canon 1, Rule 1.2:

33. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part I, paragraphs 4-9, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B) of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges.

34. Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B) states the following:

A magisterial district judge shall not, in the performance of judicial duties, by words or conduct manifest bias or prejudice, or engage in harassment, including but not limited to bias, prejudice, or harassment based upon race, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, or

political affiliation, and shall not permit court staff, court officials or others subject to the magisterial district judge's direction and control to do so.

35. By possessing the "Book of Grudges" in her office for the express purpose of notating negative commentary in it about persons who did business in MDJ Zanelli's court, and by making such notations, as set forth above at Part I, paragraphs 4-9, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B) (Count 1(a)).
36. By providing express encouragement to her staff to notate negative commentary in the "Book of Grudges" about persons who did business in MDJ Zanelli's court, set forth above at Part I, paragraphs 4-9, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B). (Count 1(b)).
37. Canon 1, Rule 1.2 states the following:

A magisterial district judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary, and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.

38. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part I, paragraphs 4-9, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 1, Rule 1.2 of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges in that her possession of, notation in, and encouragement of notation in the "Book of Grudges" by her staff failed to promote public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary and constituted actual impropriety, *i.e.*, a violation of Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B), and the appearance of impropriety. (Count 2).

Counts 3(a) and 3(b) – Violation of Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B) and Canon 1, Rule 1.1:

39. By virtue of some or all of the conduct as set forth above at Part I, paragraphs 11-12, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B) in that her possession and

display of the sexually-explicit calendar in her court office constituted harassment. (Count 3(a)).

40. Canon 1, Rule 1.1 states the following:

A judge shall comply with the law, including the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges.

41. The definition of "Law" in the "Terminology" section of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges includes, *inter alia*, statutes, decisional law, and Supreme Court Rules and directives, including the Rules themselves.

42. The Unified Judicial System's Policy on Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity (UJS Policy) falls within the ambit of the "Law" as contemplated by the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges.

43. MDJ Zanelli's in-office possession and display of the sexually explicit calendar as set forth above at Part I, paragraphs 11-12, violates Section 2(a)(2), in that it constituted "hostile work environment" harassment of a non-verbal nature, as defined by the UJS Policy.

44. By virtue of her violation of the UJS Policy, MDJ Zanelli also violated Canon 1, Rule 1.1. (Count 3(b)).

Counts 4(a), 4(b), (4)(c), 4(d), and 4(e) – Violation of Canon 2, Rule 2.6(A) and Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B):

45. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part II, paragraph 14, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.6(A) of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges.

46. Canon 2, Rule 2.6 (A) states the following:

A magisterial district judge shall accord to every person or entity who has a legal interest in a proceeding, or that person or entity's lawyer or authorized representative, the right to be heard according to law.

47. MDJ Zanelli's removal of the defendant from the courtroom in the **Jackson** case as set forth above at Part II, paragraph 14, prevented the defendant from meaningfully participating in his trial, which is a violation of Canon 2, Rule 2.6(A). (Count 4(a)).

48. Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B) of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges states the following:

A magisterial district judge shall be patient, dignified, and courteous to litigants, witnesses, lawyers, authorized representatives, court staff, court officials, and others with whom the magisterial district judge deals in an official capacity, and shall require similar conduct of lawyers, court staff, court officials, and others subject to the magisterial district judge's direction and control.

49. MDJ Zanelli's treatment of the defendant in the **Jackson** case as set forth above at Part II, paragraph 14, was impatient, undignified, and discourteous, which constitutes a violation of Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B). (Count 4(b)).

50. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part II, paragraph 15, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B) of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges, in that the conduct was undignified and discourteous to A.M., a court employee. (Count 4(c)).

51. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part II, paragraph 16, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B) of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges, in that the conduct was undignified and discourteous to A.M., a court employee. (Count 4(d)).

52. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part II, paragraph 17-18, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B) of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges, in that MDJ Zanelli's use of profanity in the office was undignified and discourteous to MDJ Zanelli's office staff. (Count 4(e)).

Count 5(a), 5(b), 5(c), and 5(d) - Violations of Canon 2, Rule 2.1, Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B), Canon 1, Rule 1.1, and Canon 1, Rule 1.2

53. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part III, Paragraphs 19-25, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.1 of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges.

54. Canon 2, Rule 2.1 states the following:

The duties of judicial office, as prescribed by law, shall ordinarily take precedence over a magisterial district judge's personal and extrajudicial activities.

55. By failing to appear on time for her judicial assignments as described above at Part III, paragraphs 19-25, MDJ Zanelli allowed her personal and extrajudicial activities to take precedence over her duties, which violates Canon 2, Rule 2.1. (Count 5(a)).

56. By failing to appear on time for her judicial assignments as described above at Part III, paragraphs 19-25, MDJ Zanelli exhibited courtesy to those bidden to appear before her by compulsory process and to her office staff, which violates Canon 2, Rule 2.8(B). (Count 5(b)).

57. By failing to appear on time for her judicial assignments as described above at Part III, paragraphs 19-25, MDJ Zanelli failed to promote public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary, which constitutes a violation of Canon 1, Rule 1.2. (Count 5(c)).

58. By failing to appear on time for her judicial assignments as described above at Part III, paragraphs 19-25, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 1, Rule 1.2, and Canon 2, Rule 2.1, which constitutes an automatic, derivative violation of Canon 1, Rule 1.1. (Count 5(d)).

Counts 6(a), 6(b) – Violation of Canon 2, Rule 2.5(B), and Canon 1, Rule 1.1:

59. By virtue of some or all of the conduct set forth above at Part IV, paragraphs 26-32, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 2, Rule 2.5(B) of the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct of Magisterial District Judges.

60. Canon 2, Rule 2.5(B) states the following:

A magisterial district judge shall cooperate with other magisterial district judges and court officials in the administration of court business.

61. By failing to correct the record of the inaccuracies reported to the State Court Administrator regarding her leave of absence as set forth above at Part IV, paragraphs 26-32, MDJ Zanelli failed to cooperate with a court official in the administration of court business. (Count 6(a)).

62. By failing to file the Pa.R.J.A. 704 report form for her absence as set forth above at Part IV, paragraphs 26-32, MDJ Zanelli violated Canon 1, Rule 1.1, as the law required her to do so. (Count 6(b)).

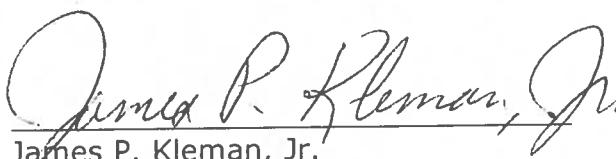
WHEREFORE, Amy L. Zanelli, Magisterial District Judge, Magisterial District Court 31-1-06, Lehigh County, is subject to disciplinary action pursuant to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Article V, § 18(d)(1).

Respectfully submitted,

MELISSA L. NORTON
Chief Counsel

DATE: January 7, 2026

By:


James P. Kleman, Jr.
Deputy Chief Counsel
Pa. Supreme Court ID No. 87637
Judicial Conduct Board
Pennsylvania Judicial Center
601 Commonwealth Avenue, Suite 3500
Harrisburg, PA 17106
(717) 234-7911

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
COURT OF JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE

IN RE:

Amy L. Zanelli
Magisterial District Judge
Magisterial District Court 31-1-06
Lehigh County

1 JD 2026

VERIFICATION

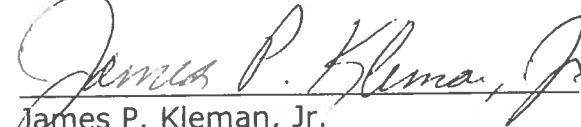
I, James P. Kleman, Jr., Deputy Chief Counsel to the Judicial Conduct Board, verify that the Judicial Conduct Board found probable cause to file the formal charges contained in this Board Complaint. I understand that the statements herein are made subject to the penalties of 18 Pa. Cons. Stat. Ann. § 4904, relating to unsworn falsification to authorities.

Respectfully submitted,

MELISSA L. NORTON
Chief Counsel

DATE: January 7, 2026

By:


James P. Kleman, Jr.
Deputy Chief Counsel
Pa. Supreme Court ID No. 87637
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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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IN RE:

Amy L. Zanelli
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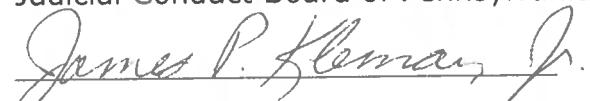
1 JD 2026

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

I certify that this filing complies with the provisions of the *Case Records Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania* that require filing confidential information and documents differently than non-confidential information and documents.

Submitted by: Judicial Conduct Board of Pennsylvania

Signature:



Name: JAMES P. KLEMAN, JR.
Deputy Chief Counsel

Attorney No.: 87637

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
COURT OF JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE

IN RE:

Amy L. Zanelli
Magisterial District Judge
Magisterial District Court 31-1-06
Lehigh County

1 JD 2026

PROOF OF SERVICE

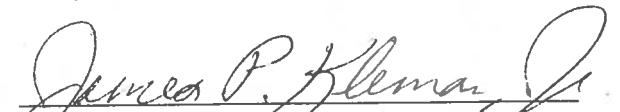
In compliance with Rule 122 of the Court of Judicial Discipline Rules of Procedure, on the date below, a copy of the Board's foregoing Complaint was sent by UPS Overnight to Judge Zanelli's counsel, Samuel C. Stretton, Esquire, who agreed to accept service, at the following address:

Samuel C. Stretton, Esquire
103 South High Street
P.O. Box 3231
West Chester, PA 19381-3231

Respectfully submitted,

DATE: January 7, 2026

By:


James P. Kleman, Jr.
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