

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
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C.S.H.B. 3452  
By: Jetton (Huffman)  
Jurisprudence  
5/17/2023  
Committee Report (Substituted)

### **AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT**

C.S.H.B. 3452 amends current law relating to the discipline of judges by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct and the legislature.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the State Commission on Judicial Conduct in SECTION 8 of this bill.

### **SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amends Section 33.001(b), Government Code, to redefine "wilful or persistent conduct that is clearly inconsistent with the proper performance of a judge's duties."

SECTION 2. Amends Section 33.0212, Government Code, as follows:

Sec. 33.0212. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON FILED COMPLAINTS. (a) Requires the State Commission on Judicial Conduct (SCJC) staff, as soon as practicable after a complaint is filed with SCJC, to conduct a preliminary investigation of the filed complaint and draft recommendations for SCJC action.

(a-1) Requires SCJC staff, on completion of the preliminary investigation and submission of recommendations under Subsection (a), to provide to the judge who is the subject of the complaint written notice of:

(1) the complaint, the results of the preliminary investigation, and the SCJC staff's recommendations for SCJC action regarding the complaint; and

(2) the judge's right to attend each SCJC meeting at which the complaint is included in the report filed with SCJC members under Subsection (a-2).

(a-2) Requires SCJC staff, not later than the 10th business day before a scheduled SCJC meeting, rather than not later than the 120th day after the date a complaint is filed with SCJC, to prepare and file with each member of SCJC a report detailing:

(1) each complaint for which a preliminary investigation has been conducted under Subsection (a) but for which the investigation report has not been finalized under Subsection (b);

(2) the results of the preliminary investigation of the complaint; and

(3) SCJC's staff's recommendations for SCJC action regarding the complaint.

(b) Requires SCJC, not later than the 120th day following the date of the first SCJC meeting at which a complaint is included in the report filed with SCJC

under Subsection (a-2), rather than not later than the 90th day following the date SCJC staff files with SCJC the report required by Subsection (a), to finalize the investigation report and determine a certain action to be taken regarding the complaint.

(b-1) Requires SCJC, after the SCJC meeting at which an investigation report is finalized and an action is determined under Subsection (b), to provide to the judge who is the subject of a complaint:

(1) written notice of the action to be taken regarding the complaint not more than five business days after the SCJC meeting; and

(2) as SCJC determines appropriate, notice of the action to be taken published on SCJC's Internet website not more than seven business days after the SCJC meeting.

(c) Authorizes SCJC, if, because of extenuating circumstances, SCJC is unable to finalize an investigation report and determine the action to be taken regarding a complaint under Subsection (b) before the 120th day following the date of the first SCJC meeting at which a complaint is included in the report filed with SCJC under Subsection (a-2), to order an extension of not more than 240 days from the date of the first SCJC meeting at which a complaint is included in the report filed with SCJC under Subsection (a-2).

Deletes existing text requiring the SCJC staff, if, because of extenuating circumstances, the SCJC staff is unable to provide an investigation report and recommendation to SCJC before the 120th day following the date the complaint was filed with SCJC, to notify SCJC and propose the number of days required for SCJC and SCJC staff to complete the investigation report and recommendations and finalize the complaint. Deletes existing text authorizing the staff to request an extension of not more than 270 days from the date the complaint was filed with SCJC. Deletes existing text requiring SCJC to finalize the complaint not later than the 270th day following the date the complaint was filed with SCJC.

(d) Redesignates existing Subsection (e) as Subsection (d). Requires SCJC, if SCJC orders an extension of time under Subsection (c), rather than if the chairperson grants additional time under Subsection (d), to timely inform the legislature of the extension. Deletes existing text authorizing the executive director to request that the chairperson grant an additional 120 days to the time provided under Subsection (c) for SCJC and SCJC staff to complete the investigation report and recommendations and finalize the complaint.

#### SECTION 3. Amends Section 33.0213, Government Code, as follows:

Sec. 33.0213. NOTIFICATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY INVESTIGATION. Requires, rather than authorizes, SCJC, on notice by any law enforcement agency investigating an action for which a complaint has been filed with SCJC, to continue an investigation that would not jeopardize a law enforcement investigation regarding the conduct subject to the complaint and authorizes SCJC to issue a censure or sanction based on the complaint. Makes nonsubstantive changes.

#### SECTION 4. Amends Section 33.034(a), Government Code, as follows:

(a) Entitles a judge who receives from SCJC a public sanction or censure issued by SCJC under Section 1-a(8) (relating to authorizing SCJC, after such investigation as it deems necessary, to take certain actions), Article V (Judicial Department), Texas Constitution, that makes the judge ineligible for assignment under Section 74.055 (List of Retired and Former Judges Subject to Assignment), rather than or any other type of sanction, to a review of SCJC's decision as provided by Section 33.034 (Review of Commission Decision).

SECTION 5. Amends Section 33.037, Government Code, as follows:

Sec. 33.037. New heading: SUSPENSION FROM OFFICE. (a) Creates this subsection from existing text.

(b) Requires SCJC, if SCJC initiates formal proceedings against a judge, to suspend the judge from office without pay not later than the 30th day after the date a special master is appointed and pending final disposition of the formal proceedings unless the special master determines the suspension is unwarranted.

(c) Requires SCJC, if SCJC issues a public reprimand of a judge based on the judge's persistent or wilful violation of Article 17.15 (Rules for Setting Amount of Bail), Code of Criminal Procedure, to:

(1) suspend the judge from office without pay for 60 days; and

(2) send notice of the reprimand and suspension to:

(A) the governor;

(B) the lieutenant governor;

(C) the speaker of the house of representatives;

(D) the presiding officers of each legislative standing committee with jurisdiction over the judiciary;

(E) the Comptroller of Public Accounts of the State of Texas;

(F) the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Texas;

(G) the Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System; and

(H) the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region for the court served by the suspended judge.

SECTION 6. Amends Section 74.055(c), Government Code, as follows:

(c) Requires a retired or former judge, to be eligible to be named on the list of retired judges subject to assignment, to meet certain criteria, including certifying under oath to the presiding judge, on a form prescribed by the state board of regional judges, that certain criteria have been met, including that the judge has never been publicly reprimanded, sanctioned, or censured, or any combination of those punishments, more than once, unless the reprimand, sanction, or censure has been reviewed and rescinded by a special court of review under Section 33.034. Makes nonsubstantive changes.

SECTION 7. Amends Section 665.052(b), Government Code, to redefine "incompetency."

SECTION 8. Requires SCJC, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act, to adopt rules to implement Section 33.001(b), Government Code, as amended by this Act.

SECTION 9. Makes application of Sections 33.001(b) and 665.052(b), Government Code, as amended by this Act, prospective.

SECTION 10. Makes application of Section 33.037, Government Code, as amended by this Act, prospective.

SECTION 11. Provides that a former or retired judge on a list maintained by a presiding judge under Section 74.055(a), Government Code, who is ineligible to be named on the list of retired judges subject to assignment under Section 74.055(c), Government Code, as amended by this Act, is required to be struck from the list on the effective date of this Act and is prohibited from being assigned to any court on or after the effective date of this Act.

SECTION 12. Effective date: September 1, 2023.