

FILED

AUG 02 2019

A.C.J.C.

SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
JUDICIAL CONDUCT

DOCKET NO: ACJC 2018-255

IN THE MATTER OF

LILIA A. MUNOZ,
JUDGE OF THE MUNICIPAL COURT

FORMAL COMPLAINT

Maureen G. Bauman, Disciplinary Counsel, Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct (“Complainant”), complaining of Municipal Court Judge Lilia A. Munoz (“Respondent”), says:

1. Respondent is a member of the Bar of the State of New Jersey, having been admitted to the practice of law in 1984.
2. At all times relevant to this matter, Respondent served as a part-time judge in the Municipal Courts of Union City and Guttenberg, positions she continues to hold.
3. At all times relevant to this matter, Respondent operated a law office as a solo practitioner.
4. From 2005 to February 2018, Respondent’s law office was located at 545-547 39th Street, Suite 100, Union City, New Jersey.
5. At all times relevant to this matter, the building in which Respondent’s law office was located was owned by 3900 LLC, of which Ramon M. Gonzalez, Esq. (“Mr. Gonzalez”) and his spouse were principals. Prior thereto, the property was owned by Mr. Gonzalez’s father.
6. Respondent had a written lease from November 2004 to November 2007 with Mr. Gonzalez’s father. When that lease expired, Respondent was never offered a new lease and

maintained her law office at 545-547 39th Street in Union City, New Jersey on a month to month basis.

7. From 2008 until January 2018, both Respondent and Mr. Gonzalez operated their law offices at 545-547 39th Street in Union City, New Jersey.

8. During the time that Respondent was a tenant in Mr. Gonzalez's building, Mr. Gonzalez appeared as counsel of record before Respondent numerous times in Union City Municipal Court and Guttenberg Municipal Court on behalf of clients.

9. Respondent's long-standing business and professional relationship with Mr. Gonzalez as set forth above, created a conflict of interest or minimally the appearance of one that required Respondent's immediate recusal from any and all matters involving Mr. Gonzalez. Respondent's failure to recuse herself in the face of this conflict of interest violated Canon 3, Rule 3.17(B) of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires a judge to recuse himself or herself in any proceeding in which the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned. Likewise, Respondent's failure to recuse violated Rule 1:12-1 (g).

10. By her conduct as described above, Respondent also impugned the integrity and impartiality of the Judiciary and demonstrated an inability to conform her conduct to the high standards of conduct expected of judges and exhibited poor judgment. Such conduct undermines the public confidence in the Judiciary and violates Canon 1, Rule 1.1 and Canon 2, Rule 2.1 of the Code of Judicial Conduct.

WHEREFORE, Complainant charges that Respondent has violated the following Canons of the Code of Judicial Conduct:

Canon 1, Rule 1.1, which requires judges to observe high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of the judiciary may be preserved;

Canon 2, Rule 2.1, which requires judges to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety and to act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary;

Canon 3, Rule 3.17(B), which requires judges to disqualify themselves in proceedings in which their impartiality or the appearance of their impartiality might reasonably be questioned;

Rule 1:12-1(g), which requires judges to disqualify themselves in proceedings in which there exists any reason that might preclude a fair and unbiased hearing and judgment, or which might reasonably lead counsel or the parties to believe so.

DATED: August 2, 2019

Maureen G. Bauman

Maureen G. Bauman, Disciplinary Counsel
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT
Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex
25 Market Street
4th Floor, North Wing
P.O. Box 037
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
(609) 815-2900 Ext. 54950