



IN THE ALABAMA COURT OF THE JUDICIARY

IN THE MATTER OF: *
*
DOUGLAS L. PATTERSON *
DISTRICT JUDGE, * CASE NO.55
LIMESTONE COUNTY, AL *

COMPLAINT

The Judicial Inquiry Commission of the State of Alabama (hereinafter "the Commission") files this Complaint against Judge Douglas L. Patterson (hereinafter "Judge Patterson"), District Judge in Limestone County, Alabama. The Commission alleges and charges as follows:

I. Introduction

1. Judge Patterson took office as District Court Judge in Limestone County, Alabama in 2016.
2. On December 11, 2019, Judge Patterson was indicted in the Circuit Court of Limestone County in a three-count indictment charging him with having committed the offenses of use of official position or office for personal gain; financial exploitation of the elderly in the first degree; and theft of property in the third degree.
3. On December 17, 2019, Judge Patterson signed a letter addressed to the Presiding Circuit Judge of the 39th Judicial Circuit (hereinafter "Presiding Judge") wherein he

admitted to stealing from elderly clients and stealing funds belonging to the people of Limestone County.

4. This Complaint charges Judge Patterson with violations of the Alabama Canons of Ethics by either having committed at least one of the crimes charged in the indictment or having created the appearance he had committed one or more of those crimes. In either instance, his conduct has brought the judicial office into disrepute and degraded public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary.

II. Facts

5. On December 11, 2019, Judge Patterson was indicted on three counts as referenced above. See Indictment, Ex. A.

6. Count 1 of the indictment charges Judge Patterson with use of official position or office for personal gain, i.e., obtaining for personal gain all or a portion of \$47,008.24 from the Limestone County Juvenile Court Services Fund, not permitted by law and in violation of Code of Alabama § 36-25-5(a).

7. Count 2 of the indictment charges Judge Patterson with financial exploitation of the elderly in the first degree, i.e., intentionally breaching a fiduciary duty to an elderly person by an unauthorized appropriation, sale, or

transfer of all or a portion of \$47,800 drawn on the elderly person's conservator account, in violation of Code of Alabama § 13A-6-195.

8. Count 3 of the indictment charges Judge Patterson with theft of property in the third degree, i.e., knowingly obtaining or exerting unauthorized control over or knowingly obtaining by deception property of the estate of a decedent with value exceeding \$500 but not exceeding \$1,499, in violation of Code of Alabama § 13A-8-4.1.

9. On December 12, 2019, Judge Patterson was arrested on this indictment. CC-2019-000729.

10. The Office of the Attorney General investigated and is prosecuting the indictment against Judge Patterson.

11. On December 17, 2019, Judge Patterson signed an incriminating letter, and pursuant to his authorization, his attorney delivered that letter to the Presiding Judge. See Judge Patterson's Letter, Ex. B.

12. In that December 17, 2019 letter, Judge Patterson admitted to the following:

Let me take this occasion to say some things to you, and others, of my unethical, criminal and reprehensible conduct.

No excuses are offered, because the things I did were not, and are not, excusable. I betrayed the

trust placed in me by my disabled and elderly clients by stealing from their funds for which I owed a fiduciary duty and trust. Then I betrayed the trust of the people of Limestone County by stealing from funds belonging to them and placed under my control. I counted as nothing the respect and honor of my colleagues in the Bar, who are totally free from responsibility for my actions. I hope the citizens of the county place responsibility on my shoulders, where it belongs. And, just as disgusting, I violated my oaths to the Constitutions of the State of Alabama and of the United States[T]he public and my clients and my colleagues owe me nothing but contempt and wrath.

. . . .

I regret allowing these charges to go unanswered this long. It is soul-freezing to finally face the enormity of my guilt. I wish only for the vindication of the reputation of the Courts and the Bar of Limestone County and total separation of them from my despicable acts, all of which were committed without their knowledge.

Ex. B.

III. CHARGES

CHARGE 1

COMMISSION OF CRIMES CHARGED IN THE INDICTMENT¹

13. Judge Patterson violated the following provisions of the Alabama Canons of Judicial Ethics, jointly or

¹ This Charge is based on Judge Patterson's admissions being sufficient to establish, for purposes of judicial discipline only, by clear and convincing evidence that Judge Patterson committed the criminal offenses. The judicial-disciplinary process serves different purposes than the criminal law.

severably, by having committed at least one of the crimes charged in the indictment:

Canon 1: A judge should uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary.

A judge should participate in . . . maintaining . . . and should himself observe high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of the judiciary may be preserved.

Canon 2: A judge should avoid impropriety . . . in all his activities.

Canon 2A: A judge should respect and comply with the law and should conduct himself at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.

Canon 5C(1): A judge should refrain from financial and business dealings that . . . exploit his judicial position.

CHARGE 2

CREATING THE APPEARANCE OF COMMISSION OF CRIMES

14. Judge Patterson violated the following provisions of the Alabama Canons of Judicial Ethics, jointly or severably, by having created the appearance that he committed one or more of the crimes charged in the indictment:

Canon 1: A judge should uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary.

A judge should participate in . . . maintaining . . . and should himself observe high standards of conduct so

that the integrity and independence of the judiciary may be preserved.

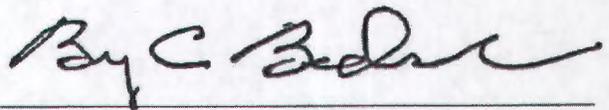
Canon 2: A judge should avoid . . . the appearance of impropriety in all his activities.

Canon 2A: A judge should respect and comply with the law and should conduct himself at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.

Canon 2B: A judge should at all times maintain the decorum and temperance befitting the office and should avoid conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice which brings the judicial office into disrepute.

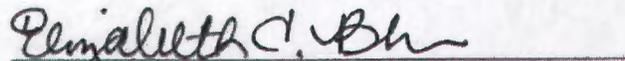
Done this 15th day of January, 2020.

THE JUDICIAL INQUIRY COMMISSION



Billy C. Bedsole
Chairman

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION



Elizabeth C. Bern
Attorney for the Commission
Alabama Judicial Inquiry
Commission
P.O. Box 303400
Montgomery, AL 36130-3400
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(334) 242-4089

EXHIBIT A

DOCUMENT 2

INDICTMENT

No. 65-19-76
CC-19-729

THE STATE OF ALABAMA
LIMESTONE COUNTY

Circuit Court of Limestone County, December 2019

STATE OF ALABAMA v. DOUGLAS LEE PATTERSON

COUNT 1: § 36-25-5(a), Use of official position or office for personal gain.

The Grand Jury of Limestone County charges that, before the finding of this indictment, DOUGLAS LEE PATTERSON, whose name is otherwise unknown to the Grand Jury, did intentionally use or cause to be used his official position or office, to wit: District Court Judge of the 39th Judicial Circuit in Limestone County, Alabama, to obtain personal gain for himself, a family member, or a business with which he is associated, to wit: all of or a portion of \$47,008.24 in U.S. currency and/or checks derived from the Limestone County Juvenile Court Services Fund created pursuant to Alabama Code section 45-42-81, and that such use and gain were not otherwise permitted by law, in violation of Alabama Code section 36-25-5(a), against the peace and dignity of the State of Alabama.

COUNT 2: § 13A-6-195, Financial exploitation of the elderly in the first degree.

The Grand Jury of Limestone County charges that, before the finding of this indictment, DOUGLAS LEE PATTERSON, whose name is otherwise unknown to the Grand Jury, did intentionally breach a fiduciary duty to an elderly person, to wit: Mr. Charles Hardy, as the guardian, conservator, or agent under a power of attorney, which resulted in an unauthorized appropriation, sale, or transfer of the elderly person's property, which exceeded \$2,500.00, to wit: all of or a portion of \$47,800 in U.S. currency and/or checks drawn on the conservator account for Mr. Charles Hardy, a better description of which is unknown to the Grand Jury, in violation of Alabama Code section 13A-6-195, against the peace and dignity of the State of Alabama.

COUNT 3: § 13A-8-4.1, Theft of property in the third degree.

The Grand Jury of Limestone County charges that, before the finding of this indictment, DOUGLAS LEE PATTERSON, whose name is otherwise unknown to the Grand Jury, did knowingly obtain or exert unauthorized control over, or did knowingly obtain by deception control over the property of the estate of Mr. Rudolph Allen, with an aggregate value that exceeds \$500 but does not exceed \$1,499, with the intent to deprive the owner of the property, in violation of Alabama Code section 13A-8-4.1, against the peace and dignity of the State of Alabama.

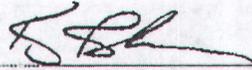
STEVE MARSHALL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

EXHIBIT A

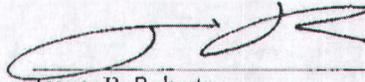
DOCUMENT 2

INDICTMENT

No. _____



Kyle Beckman
Assistant Attorney General



Jasper B. Roberts
Assistant Attorney General

EXHIBIT A

DOCUMENT 2

GJ No: 65-19-76

CC No. 00-19-729

THE STATE OF ALABAMA

v.

DOUGLAS LEE PATTERSON,



CHARGES

§ 36-25-5(a), Use of official position or office for personal gain (COUNT 1)
§ 13A-6-195, Financial exploitation of the elderly in the first degree (COUNT 2)
§ 13A-8-4.1, Theft of property in the third degree (COUNT 3)

A TRUE BILL

Jenny Butler
Foreperson of Grand Jury

BAIL IN THIS CASE IS FIXED AT

\$ 30,000.00

Anna S. Haddock
Circuit Court Judge of Limestone County

Presented in open court by the Foreperson of the Limestone County Special Grand Jury in the presence of 14 other members of the Grand Jury and filed this 11 day of December, 2019.

BLCA
Circuit Court Clerk

WITNESS:

Robert Stuart
Special Agent
Office of Alabama Attorney General
501 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104

EXHIBIT B

December 17, 2019

Honorable Robert M. Baker
Presiding Circuit Judge
39th Judicial Circuit
c/o Limestone County Courthouse
200 Washington Street, West
Athens, Alabama 35611-2563

Judge Baker:

I acknowledge service of and receipt of your December 16, 2019, letter. Thank you for the opportunity to secure my belongings. I will arrange to get my things on Thursday, December 19, 2019, with John McCormick of the Limestone County Sheriff's Department.

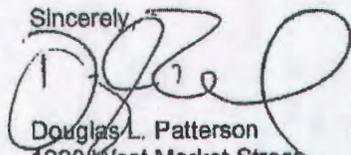
Let me take this occasion to say some things to you, and others, of my unethical, criminal and reprehensible conduct:

No excuses are offered, because the things I did were not, and are not, excusable. I betrayed the trust placed in me by my disabled and elderly clients by stealing from their funds for which I owed a fiduciary duty and trust. Then I betrayed the trust of the people of Limestone County by stealing from funds belonging to them and placed under my control. I counted as nothing the respect and honor of my colleagues in the Bar; who are totally free from responsibility for my actions. I hope the citizens of the county place responsibility on my shoulders, where it belongs. And, just as disgusting, I violated my oaths to the Constitutions of the State of Alabama and of the United States...and to Almighty God. I will seek His forgiveness . . . the public and my clients and my colleagues owe me nothing but contempt and wrath. I have disgraced the good name given me by my parents. I trodden underfoot my vows to my wife. I have created a legacy of ill will and hardship for my children and family. Of course, mere words cannot describe my shameful conduct.

I regret allowing these charges to go unanswered this long. It is soul-freezing to finally face the enormity of my guilt. I wish only for the vindication of the reputation of the Courts and the Bar of Limestone County and total separation of them from my despicable acts; all of which were committed without their knowledge.

Finally, but as fervently, I acknowledge having been served by my faithful secretary, Deanna McNeill, whose service to me was of the highest character. I am not worthy to seek her, or anyone else's, forgiveness.

Sincerely,



Douglas L. Patterson
1220 West Market Street
Athens, Alabama 35611-4779

cc: Honorable B. Chadwick Wise
Circuit Court Judge – Limestone County

Honorable Matthew R. Huggins
District Court Judge – Limestone County

Honorable Debbie L. Long
President – Limestone County Bar Association