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By Melissa Bybee-Fields at 3:09 pm, Oct 28, 2025

**BEFORE THE KENTUCKY GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PETITION FOR IMPEACHMENT  
OF PAMELA GOODWINE, SUPREME COURT JUSTICE  
FOR THE 5TH SUPREME COURT DISTRICT**

Clerk, Kentucky House of Representatives  
700 Capitol Avenue  
Capitol, Room 304  
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Madam Clerk:

As a citizen of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and pursuant to Section 66 of its Constitution, I hereby petition the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky for the impeachment of Pamela Goodwine, Supreme Court Justice for the 5th Supreme Court District.

Justice Goodwine has breached the public trust and engaged in a variety of inappropriate acts, any one of which constitutes an impeachable misdemeanor under the Kentucky Constitution. Ky. Const. § 68.

**SUMMARY OF IMPEACHABLE OFFENSES**

Justice Goodwine participated in the case of *Russell Coleman v. Jefferson County Board of Education and Robbie Fletcher, Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education*, in which she had a blatant conflict of interest and an inescapable appearance of bias, resulting in a decision granting extraordinary relief to parties who had spent obscene amounts of cash to elect her to the Kentucky Supreme Court. She voted to grant a rare and extraordinary rehearing of a decided case in favor of those special interests. Her decision to grant rehearing voided a ruling adverse to those political patrons, thus creating the appearance (at a minimum) of political bias, and an actual conflict of interest, in violation of the law and rules of judicial ethics.

Justice Goodwine was certainly aware that her impartiality had been reasonably questioned - publicly and in writing - by multiple parties, and it having been the subject of multiple media reports and editorials. She had an objective appearance of bias, and her failure to recuse violated the law.

- Justice Goodwine violated KRS 26A.015, which requires her to disqualify herself in any proceeding where she has a personal bias or prejudice concerning a party, or where she has knowledge of any other circumstances in which her impartiality might reasonably be questioned.

- Justice Goodwine violated Rule 2.11 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires that a judge shall disqualify himself or herself in any proceeding in which the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned.
- Justice Goodwine violated RAP 43(B)(1)(a), which establishes that a petition for rehearing will be granted only when it appears that the court has overlooked a material fact in the record, or a controlling statute or decision, or has misconceived the issues presented on the appeal or the law applicable thereto.
- Justice Goodwine violated the due process rights of the litigants before her by failure to recuse herself amid questions about her impartiality.
- Justice Goodwine's failure to recuse and her subsequent vote to grant the extraordinary rehearing in favor of her political patrons has undermined faith in the judiciary and the justice system.

### FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Kentucky Senate Bill ("S.B.") 1 was enacted in 2022 over the veto of Democrat Governor Andy Beshear. Senate Bill 1 instituted various changes to the duties and responsibilities of a school board relative to those of its superintendent in a county school district in a county with a consolidated local government adopted under KRS Chapter 67C.

The Jefferson County Board of Education sued to enjoin the law, claiming that it was unconstitutional special legislation. As the case was being considered by the intermediate Court of Appeals, on September 12, 2023 Chief Justice Laurance VanMeter announced that he would not seek reelection. Days later on September 15, 2023, Pam Goodwine announced her candidacy for Supreme Court in the November 5, 2024, election. Knowing that the case would ultimately be decided by the Kentucky Supreme Court, groups opposed to Senate bill one, including Democrat governor Andy Beshear and historically partisan teachers' unions became very active in the Supreme Court election.

On March 6, 2024, the Kentucky Supreme Court granted discretionary review of *Coleman v. JCBOE*, the case challenging the constitutionality of Senate Bill 1.

### Beshear's endorsement

Democratic Governor Andy Beshear endorsed Goodwine's candidacy in March 2024, and contributed to her campaign through his federal leadership PAC "In This Together."<sup>1</sup> He also apparently appeared as the special guest at a fundraiser for Goodwine. Beshear's longtime political strategist, Eric Hyers, also led a PAC named Kentuckians for Good Judges formed to support Goodwine.<sup>2</sup> Kentuckians for Good Judges received only two contributions.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wkyufm.org/news/2024-03-26/beshears-pac-issues-first-wave-of-endorsements>

<sup>2</sup> <https://kentucky Lantern.com/2024/06/17/judicial-watchdog-criticizes-beshears-involvement-in-kentucky-supreme-court-election/>

On June 17, 2024, the Kentucky Judicial Campaign Conduct Committee — a private, nonprofit group organized to safeguard the integrity of the judiciary in Kentucky judicial elections — sent an open letter to Goodwine on Monday expressing concern about Beshear's endorsement. That letter read as follows:<sup>3</sup>

Dear Judge Goodwine:

The Kentucky Judicial Campaign Conduct Committee is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan group organized to safeguard the integrity of the judiciary in Kentucky judicial elections. We believe judicial elections are different from other elections, for good reason, and should remain that way. We are concerned about the recent increase of partisanship in judicial elections, as evidenced by our public statements in 2022 about the Northern Kentucky race for the Supreme Court (published on our website, listed above).

We are likewise concerned that Gov. Andy Beshear's political action committee has endorsed your candidacy for the Kentucky Supreme Court. He is Kentucky's highest-ranking official who is elected on a partisan basis, and is widely known as a Democrat, so we believe that if you were to refer to his endorsement in your campaign, that would violate the spirit of Section 117 of the Kentucky Constitution, which makes judicial elections nonpartisan.

The intent of that section is to separate the judiciary from partisan politics, and maintaining that separation has long been a major interest of our Committee, which is made up of Democrats, Republicans and independents. We have expressed our concerns to the governor, and now we express them to you.

The Executive Branch often appears before the Kentucky Supreme Court. This could present an appearance of conflict, if not actual conflict, for any justice who was supported by the sitting governor. While a justice may recuse from a case, the governor appoints the temporary replacement justice. So, we think members of the Executive Branch, especially the governor, should not be involved in judicial elections.

Now that the governor is involved in your campaign, it is largely up to you what to make of his endorsement. While you certainly have every right to use it, we believe doing so would further blur the line between judicial and partisan elections, and have the effect of eroding public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://kyjccc.blogspot.com/2024/06/committee-expresses-concern-about.html>

Our Committee may make a public statement on this matter, but before we do that, we would like to hear from you, either in writing, in person or an online meeting.

Then-Judge Goodwine was not only aware of the criticism but responded as follows:<sup>4</sup>

Upon election to the Kentucky Supreme Court, I will continue to adhere to the highest ethical standards and, if faced with a situation where my impartiality was reasonably called into question, I would carefully consider the circumstances and if necessary recuse myself to ensure the integrity of the judicial process.

#### Campaign Cash from Beshear and Teachers' Unions

Independent groups opposing Senate Bill 1 collectively spent nearly \$1 million on advertisements supporting Goodwine's candidacy. The support for Goodwine included \$510,000 from two groups affiliated with Democrat Governor Andy Beshear, who had vetoed Senate Bill 1. Kentuckians for Good Judges received only two contributions in the election cycle - \$335,000 from Beshear's PAC "In This Together" and \$175,000 from his dark money organization "Heckbent" – spending nearly all of it on mailers advocating Goodwine's election.<sup>5</sup>

Liberty & Justice for Kentucky, a political action committee that also assisted Kentucky Supreme Court Justice Michelle Keller in her Northern Kentucky district race in 2022 and Franklin Circuit Judge Phillip Shepherd in his winning bid that year, reportedly spent nearly half a million dollars supporting Goodwine's candidacy. The PAC received \$200,000 from Better Schools Kentucky, the PAC of the Jefferson County Teachers Association, which had strongly opposed Senate Bill 1.<sup>6</sup> The statewide teachers' union Kentucky Education Association, which opposed Senate Bill 1 - also reportedly contributed \$100,000 to Goodwine's election.<sup>7</sup>

#### Public Reaction

The endorsements and contributions were widely discussed in media and criticized by watchdog groups and public officials alike. Sen. Lindsey Tichenor, R-Smithfield, said "there's something insanely wrong with a teacher's union dumping \$200,000 into a Supreme (Court) race." Goodwine's opponent in the Supreme Court election, Erin Izzo, stated: "It looks bad and it is bad. Judicial races need to be nonpartisan. That's the only way that you can really ensure that the decision that you're getting from your justice is based on the law and is not based on political favor. I think the public's tired of having

<sup>4</sup> <https://kyjccc.blogspot.com/2024/06/committee-expresses-concern-about.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lpm.org/news/2024-12-13/beshear-pacs-chipped-in-510k-to-help-elect-a-ky-supreme-court-justice-what-now>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/election/voter-guide/article294068319.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.lpm.org/news/2025-04-24/kentucky-supreme-court-orders-rehearing-on-law-to-limit-jcps-board-power>

politics play such a role in what goes on.”<sup>8</sup> Izzo told Kentucky Public Radio that JCTA spending for Goodwine “reeks of a significant attempt to buy influence on our Supreme Court.” “Voters should reject it, and demand fairness and impartiality from our judges at all levels,” Izzo said. “Kentuckians deserve a Supreme Court that is independent, not one acting as a rubber stamp for a left wing SuperPAC and the Teachers’ Unions.”<sup>9</sup>

#### Kentucky Supreme Court finds Senate Bill 1 is constitutional.

On March 6, 2024, The Kentucky Supreme Court granted discretionary review of the case challenging the constitutionality of Senate Bill 1. On review, the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled in an opinion dated December 19, 2024, that Senate Bill 1 was constitutional and did not constitute special legislation. *Russell Coleman v. Jefferson County Board of Education and Robbie Fletcher, Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education*. Joining the majority in that opinion was Chief Justice Laurance VanMeter.

#### Goodwine replaces VanMeter and immediately votes for rehearing.

Goodwine was sworn in as Supreme Court Justice on April 18, 2025. On April 24, 2025, Goodwine cast the deciding vote to grant rehearing in *Coleman v. JCBOE* and withdraw the Opinion of the Court rendered on December 19, 2024. This is despite the dissent of three justices noting that the grant of rehearing under RAP 38(B) was inappropriate because the issues had already been presented to the Court in previous briefing.<sup>10</sup> There had been no new facts, arguments, or changes in the law. The only change in the posture of the case had been the retirement of Chief Justice VanMeter and the election of Justice Goodwine.

The extraordinary nature of the relief was noted by elected officials and leaders, who noted that the Court rarely grants petitions for rehearing on cases it has already decided. Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman said he was “stunned by the Kentucky Supreme Court’s ruling to undo its own decision.”

The grant of rehearing was perceived by many as a partisan political outcome. House Speaker David Osborne criticized the move to rehear the case: “The Court’s decision to rehear a case they ruled on just four months ago is troubling at the very least because the facts and arguments of the case remain the same — only the membership of the Court has changed,” Osborne said. “Unfortunately, judicial outcomes seem

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/election/voter-guide/article294068319.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.lpm.org/news/2024-09-18/louisville-teachers-union-spends-big-on-kentucky-supreme-court-race>

<sup>10</sup> Pursuant to the Court’s rules, specifically RAP 43(B)(1)(a), “Except in extraordinary cases when justice demands it, a petition for rehearing shall be limited to a consideration of the issues argued on the appeal and will be granted only when it appears that the court has overlooked a material fact in the record, or a controlling statute or decision, or has misconceived the issues presented on the appeal or the law applicable thereto.”

increasingly driven by partisan politics. Kentuckians would be better served to keep politics out of the court, and the court out of politics."<sup>11</sup>

Goodwine was well aware of the objective appearance of bias, but despite the statute, the Code of Judicial Conduct, and legal precedent, participated in the decision.

KRS 26A.015(2) requires that "Any justice or judge of the Court of Justice or master commissioner shall disqualify himself in any proceeding: (a) Where he has a personal bias or prejudice concerning a party... or (e) Where he has knowledge of any other circumstances in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned."

Rule 2.11 of the Kentucky Code of Judicial Conduct requires that a judge "shall disqualify himself or herself in any proceeding in which the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned...." Under the Rule, a judge's obligation not to hear or decide matters in which disqualification is required applies regardless of whether a motion to disqualify is filed.

RAP 43(B)(1)(a) establishes that a petition for rehearing will be granted only when it appears that the court has overlooked a material fact in the record, or a controlling statute or decision, or has misconceived the issues presented on the appeal or the law applicable thereto.

The Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that massive campaign spending such as benefitted Goodwine demands recusal of a state Supreme Court Justice. That Court held that there are objective standards that require recusal when "the probability of actual bias on the part of the judge or decisionmaker is too high to be constitutionally tolerable." *See Caperton v. Massey*. In relation to *Coleman v. JCBOE*, it was apparent that, absent recusal, Justice Goodwine would review a judgment adverse to her largest political benefactors. As *Caperton* held, just as no person is allowed to be a judge in his own cause, similar fears of bias arise when a person chooses the judge in his own cause. Applying this principle to the judicial election process, there was here a serious, objective risk of actual bias that required Justice Goodwine's recusal. *See Caperton v. Massey*.

Citing the same concerns, Judge Phillip Shepherd recused himself from a case involving the Kentucky Education Association following that group's contribution to the same Liberty & Justice for Kentucky PAC, which made significant campaign expenditures on his behalf. Shepherd wrote that public confidence in the court system is "more easily undermined by vast independent expenditures than publicly reported individual donations that are limited by law..." "If the Court rules in favor of the KEA, reasonable people may wonder if the ruling was influenced by the KEA's financial support for the independent expenditure supporting the judge in the last election."<sup>12</sup> This ruling was cited in an article

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.lpm.org/news/2025-04-24/kentucky-supreme-court-orders-rehearing-on-law-to-limit-jcps-board-power>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.lpm.org/news/2024-12-13/beshear-pacs-chipped-in-510k-to-help-elect-a-ky-supreme-court-justice-what-now>

discussing the expenditures made for Goodwine and whether she would need to recuse from cases involving Beshear. Goodwine clearly knew of these precedents acknowledging the appearance of bias and impropriety in such circumstances before she agreed to sit on the case.

As the decision in *Caperton* makes clear, Goodwine's failure to recuse in these circumstances violated the due process of the litigants before her, and has undermined confidence in an impartial judiciary.

#### JUSTICE GOODWINE'S ACTIONS ARE IMPEACHABLE OFFENSES

- Justice Goodwine violated KRS 26A.015
- Justice Goodwine violated Rule 2.11 of the Code of Judicial Conduct
- Justice Goodwine violated RAP 43(B)(1)(a)
- Justice Goodwine violated the due process rights of litigants
- Justice Goodwine has undermined faith in the judiciary and the justice system

Any one of these actions alone qualifies as an impeachable misdemeanor pursuant to the Kentucky Constitution. When taken together, the result is clear: Justice Goodwine must be removed from office. We respectfully request the House of Representatives begin proceedings to do so.

WHEREFORE, the undersigned Petitioner hereby Petition the House of Representatives to impeach Pamela Goodwine, to remove her from the office of Supreme Court Justice for the 5th Supreme Court District, and disqualify her to hold any office of honor, trust or profit under this Commonwealth.

  
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JACK RICHARDSON, PETITIONER