

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS



THIRTY-NINTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA FRANKLIN AND FULTON COUNTY BRANCHES

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The 39th Judicial District Common Pleas Judges;
The 39th Judicial District Magisterial Judges;
District Court Administrator and Court Administration Staff;
Court Employees of the 39th Judicial District;
Franklin and Fulton County Commissioners
The Franklin County Bar Association

FROM: Shawn D. Meyers, President Judge *SDM*

RE: The Honorable Andrew Wilkinson, Circuit Court Judge in Washington County,
Maryland, Murdered

DATE: October 20, 2023

By now many of you have learned of the tragic murder of Judge Andrew Wilkinson, a resident of Hagerstown, Maryland, husband, father, and community leader. Authorities report that Judge Wilkinson was murdered by a litigant who disagreed with his decision in a family court matter. He was killed for performing his constitutional, statutory and lawfully required duties.

I join all who are mourning his loss and offer my thoughts and prayers to his wife, children, and family.

Judges are entrusted with upholding the rule of law, which necessarily requires them to make decisions that determine questions of right and wrong and establish winners and losers, under the law. Each and every decision is popular with some and unpopular with others. Historically, the citizens of our nation have respected the rule of law. Despite expressing their dissent in some notable cases, citizens have deferred and consented to the rulings of the judiciary with little violence. Unfortunately, many polls and surveys advise us that our citizens are losing respect for governmental institutions, which includes a loss of trust and respect for the judiciary at both the federal and state level. While the conduct of some members of the judiciary has contributed to this public loss of trust and respect, there is also a significant increase in the national discussion, especially on social media advocating for a lack of respect

and trust in the judiciary. Needless to say, this inflammatory language only undermines the respect for judges and heightens the potential for violence by those who appear before them. I ask all of us to commit in our words and deeds to encourage respectful dissent when warranted, but also advocating for respect of not only the judiciary, but all government institutions.

Attached you will find a statement issued by Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, President of the Conference of Chief Justices, and Greg Sattizahn, President of the Conference of State Court Administrators, issued by the National Center for State Courts. I join them in their observations in response to the assassination of Judge Wilkinson.



NEWS RELEASE

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Statement on the killing of Maryland Judge Andrew Wilkinson

Williamsburg, Va., Oct. 20, 2023 – National court leaders are mourning the tragic killing of Maryland Circuit Court Judge Andrew Wilkinson, who was shot outside his home in Washington County, Maryland last night.

“The assassination of Judge Wilkinson should be shocking to all Americans,” said Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, President of the Conference of Chief Justices, and Greg Sattizahn, President of the Conference of State Court Administrators. “Unfortunately, we fear it is not. The sustained attacks in recent years on the rule of law, public institutions of government and the courts are now having their effects. We ask all Americans to think carefully about this troubling trend because normalizing these attacks will in no way make us better, safer, or more peaceful. If anything, it will only come with more troubling and dire consequences, as Judge Wilkinson’s family can now sadly attest. To his family and our colleagues in the Maryland judiciary, we send our deepest condolences.”

According to data compiled by the National Center for State Courts, this is the third targeted shooting of a state judge in the last three years.

The National Center for State Courts, headquartered in Williamsburg, Va., is a nonprofit court organization dedicated to improving the administration of justice by providing leadership and service to the state courts. Founded in 1971 by the Conference of Chief Justices and Chief Justice of the United States Warren E. Burger, NCSC provides education, training, technology, management, and research services to the nation’s state courts.