

SUPREME COURT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

In the Matter of Former Judge James E. Crook, Spartanburg County
Magistrate Court

Opinion No. 28320; Appellate Case No. 2025-002237 · No. 2025-002237 · Decided March 18, 2026

SUMMARY

The South Carolina Supreme Court accepted an Agreement for Discipline by Consent involving former Spartanburg County Magistrate James E. Crook. The court publicly reprimanded Crook for displaying sexually explicit photographs to a court employee, found violations of Canons 1, 1A, and 2A of the Code of Judicial Conduct, and required him to pay disciplinary costs and refrain from seeking or accepting future judicial office in South Carolina.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of South Carolina
WRITING FOR THE COURT	KITTREDGE, C.J.; FEW, J.; JAMES, J.; HILL, J.; VERDIN, J.
JURISDICTION	South Carolina
DECIDED	March 18, 2026
DOCKET	2025-002237
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Judicial disciplinary proceeding arising from an Agreement for Discipline by Consent under Rule 21 of the Rules for Judicial Disciplinary Enforcement. The respondent admitted misconduct, resigned his judicial position, agreed not to seek or accept future judicial office in South Carolina, and consented to discipline.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion

TOPICS

- administrative law
- agency adjudication
- remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

- judicial discipline
- professional responsibility
- administrative law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Supreme Court should accept the parties' Agreement for Discipline by Consent.
2. Whether Respondent's admitted conduct violated the Code of Judicial Conduct and constituted grounds for discipline.
3. What sanction was appropriate after Respondent resigned and agreed not to seek or accept future judicial office in South Carolina.

HOLDINGS

1. Respondent's conduct violated Canon 1, Canon 1A, and Canon 2A of the Code of Judicial Conduct, and the violation constituted a ground for discipline under Rule 7(a)(1) of the Rules for Judicial Disciplinary Enforcement.
2. The court accepted the Agreement for Discipline by Consent and publicly reprimanded Respondent. Because Respondent no longer held judicial office and agreed not to seek or accept another judicial position in South Carolina, a public reprimand was the most severe available sanction.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“This is the strongest punishment we can give Respondent, given the fact that he has already resigned his duties as a judge.”

“A public reprimand is the most severe sanction that can be imposed when the respondent no longer holds judicial office.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On October 14, 2024, Respondent, then a Spartanburg County magistrate, showed a court employee photographs of a woman posing in sexually suggestive attire and positions. The employee reported the incident to her supervisor, who reported it to other judges, and the Chief Magistrate submitted the employee's written statement to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel. Respondent admitted showing the photographs, acknowledged that his conduct was inappropriate, resigned from his position, and agreed never to seek or accept another judicial office in South Carolina.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A court employee reported Respondent's conduct to supervisory judges, and the Chief Magistrate submitted the employee's written statement to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel. Respondent and the Office of Disciplinary Counsel entered into an Agreement for Discipline by Consent. The Supreme Court of South Carolina accepted the Agreement, publicly reprimanded Respondent, and ordered him to pay investigative and prosecutorial costs within thirty days.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- In re Gravely, 321 S.C. 235, 467 S.E.2d 924 (1996)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA In The Supreme Court In the Matter of Former Judge James E. Crook, Spartanburg County Magistrate Court Appellate Case No. 2025-002237 Opinion No. 28320 Submitted February 20, 2026 – Filed March 18, 2026 PUBLIC REPRIMAND Disciplinary Counsel William M. Blitch, Jr., and Assistant Disciplinary Counsel Phylicia Yvette Christine Coleman, both of Columbia, for the Office of Disciplinary Counsel.

Scott Franklin Talley, of Talley Law Firm, P.A., of Spartanburg, for Respondent. PER CURIAM: In this judicial disciplinary matter, Respondent and the Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) have entered into an Agreement for Discipline by Consent (Agreement) pursuant to Rule 21 of the Rules for Judicial Disciplinary Enforcement (RJDE) contained in Rule 502 of the South Carolina Appellate Court Rules (SCACR).

In the Agreement, Respondent admits misconduct and consents to a confidential admonition or a public reprimand. Respondent has also resigned his position and agrees never to seek or accept a judicial office in South Carolina in the future.

We accept the Agreement and publicly reprimand Respondent. I. On October 14, 2024, J.J. reported to work at the Spartanburg County Magistrate Court. When Respondent arrived, he made small talk with J.J. then went to his office. J.J. entered Respondent's office to place information for upcoming bond arraignments on Respondent's desk.

As she was leaving, Respondent asked J.J., "How well [sic] are you at guessing someone's age?" Respondent then proceeded to show J.J. a photo of a woman posing in a position with her buttocks facing the camera. Respondent showed J.J. an additional photo of the same woman in her bra and panties, posing on her knees, with her legs spread and arms above her head.

J.J. told Respondent the woman looked to be in her 50s or 60s. Respondent laughed and indicated the woman looked like his ex. J.J. left Respondent's office and returned to her desk. Respondent called J.J.'s name and told her, "I just want you to know I'm not a pervert." J.J. told Respondent she did not want to talk about it anymore, and Respondent ended the conversation.

After her shift, J.J. informed her supervisor of what occurred. The supervisor reported the incident to two other judges, including the Chief Magistrate (Complainant). J.J. gave Complainant a written statement, and Complainant filed that statement with ODC on October 18, 2024. Respondent admits showing J.J. the photos but denies he was attempting to insinuate, in any way, an attraction to J.J.

Respondent acknowledges his conduct was inappropriate and resigned from his position. II. Respondent admits that his conduct violated the following provisions of the Code of Judicial Conduct, Rule 501, SCACR: Canon 1 (requiring a judge to uphold the integrity of the judiciary); Canon 1A (requiring a judge to maintain and personally observe high standards of conduct); Canon 2A (requiring a judge to act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary).

Respondent further admits his misconduct is a ground for discipline under Rule 7(a)(1), RJDE, Rule 502, SCACR (providing a violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct is a ground for discipline). As a condition of discipline, Respondent agrees not to seek or accept judicial office in South Carolina in the future. III.

Because Respondent is no longer a judge and because he has agreed not to hereafter seek or accept another judicial position in South Carolina in the future, we accept the Agreement and issue a public reprimand. This is the strongest punishment we can give Respondent, given the fact that he has already resigned his duties as a judge. See *In re Gravely*, 321 S.C.

235, 467 S.E.2d 924 (1996) ("A public reprimand is the most severe sanction that can be imposed when the respondent no longer holds judicial office.") Accordingly, Respondent is hereby publicly reprimanded for his misconduct. Within thirty days, Respondent shall pay the costs incurred in the investigation and prosecution of this matter by ODC and the Commission on Judicial Conduct.

PUBLIC REPRIMAND. KITTREDGE, C.J., FEW, JAMES, HILL and VERDIN, JJ., concur.