

March 10, 2010

STATEMENT OF JUDGE LAURIE A WHITE:

I can sympathize with the DA being offended when he says he was assailed personally and professionally, since that is exactly what the DA is doing to me in his most recent tirade. While I have not personally or professionally assailed his character I certainly believe that this is his attempt to negatively reflect on my character and professionalism.

The DA has once again directed his anger at me, although it was a former assistant district attorney that launched the issue of "pick and plea trials" that may have occurred when DA Cannizarro was a Judge. The DA was obviously perturbed by the several news accounts which were reporting on the Court's current jury trial numbers but the stories turned their attention to his work while a judge and the issue of picking a jury to count as a trial and then a defendant enters a guilty plea. I did not say anything personally or professionally to offend the DA and frankly, find it curious that I am being singled out and that trial stats from 1989 are being compared to 2010. I am not in any competition with DA Cannizarro or any fellow judge. I forge my own path.

I issue these comments in response to the DA's current unfair and incorrect dissemination of information about my judicial and community service. I am proud of the job I do as a Judge at Criminal District Court. I am responsible and efficient and certainly consider myself part of the solution, not the problem.

In the DA's latest communiqué he has reported my judicial attendance from March 1, 2010 to Feb 28, 2011 alleging that I am "not showing up for work". During the DA's attendance record period there were 243 court days, not 249; as the DA failed to subtract 6 days that were Court holidays. Court cannot be conducted when the Courthouse is closed. {7/2/10, 10/11/10, 11/1/10, 11/2/10, 1/3/11, 2/21/11}.

As a former judge, DA Cannizarro is aware of the additional administrative and committee responsibilities placed on a sitting judge. Among other committees, I am on the Legislative Committee for our Court which required my testimony in Baton Rouge on legislation pertaining to bills being considered by lawmakers. I was 5 days at that task in 2010 and thus unable to handle a court docket. I was successful in lobbying and having law passed to create the first Re-entry Courts in Louisiana which has established a pilot program in my section of court and Section K. This program has been recognized as innovative, rehabilitative, and at no cost to taxpayers.

Fulfilling annual obligations required by lawyers and judges during 2010, I attended a total of 5 different Continuing Legal Education courses that resulted in 12 days away from my Court. In 2010, I was also sick 5 days and thus absent from Court.

I was on vacation 19 days during 2010. But at no time has there been a docket set in my section and left unattended because I was not present. All parties are notified in advance of any date that I will not be in court. In 2011, I have taken 13 days vacation but had an ad hoc judge appointed so that my docket would continue to move efficiently.

Criminal District Court handles judge and jury matters in misdemeanor and felony cases in Orleans Parish. Under standard operating procedure of the Court the jury venire was released from jury service on December 9, 2010 for the holiday season. I continued to handle motions and other matters from Dec 10 through 20, 2010. The District Attorney has reported that I was absent from Court December 21, 22, 23, 28, and 29, 2010; however, it was the DA who chose not to set any cases or any matter in my Court on those dates. Louisiana law grants the District Attorney the right to set and call cases; it is not in the purview of the Judge to do so. I presided over a full Court docket on Dec 30th 2010 although it is reported by the DA's attendance record that I was absent from Court on that date as well. Specifically, on December 30, 2010 I received in open court numerous indictments from the Grand Jury.

As our Court's sponsor, I was away one day in 2010 in Washington DC attending training by the American Bar Association for the Racial Diversity & Justice grant. I attended with a representative from the DA's office, NOPD, Public Defender and a community member of the task force. We were successful in receiving funding for a study program presently being established in Orleans Parish.

I was present on April 22, 2010 and held Court although the DA's records report that I was absent. Assistant DA's reset the docket that day in open court as they had been in trial until midnight the night before in a twelve member jury trial of State v. Damon Williams, No. 487-625A. The State requested continuances in all matters set that day because they were not prepared to proceed.

In January 2011 my section of court tried 7 jury trials and 2 judge trials. In February 2011, my section presided over 4 jury trials and 2 judge trials. Forty-nine cases were concluded by guilty pleas in the first 2 months of this year in my section of court.

The DA's scrutiny would be better served on the training of his young Assistant District Attorney's so that everyday they can announce ready for trial on each and every case set for trial in court.

In the future, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Judges and DA's concerns or perceived problems on a face to face basis, rather than communicating via the media. I desire for this Court, as well as myself, to have an open, ongoing dialog in which we can discuss issues affecting the Criminal Justice system.