

Sec. 32. [Judicial standards commission.]

There is created the "judicial standards commission", consisting of two justices or judges, one magistrate and two lawyers selected as may be provided by law to serve for terms of four years, and six citizens, none of whom is a justice, judge or magistrate of any court or licensed to practice law in this state, who shall be appointed by the governor for five-year staggered terms as may be provided by law. If a position on the commission becomes vacant for any reason, the successor shall be selected by the original appointing authority in the same manner as the original appointment was made and shall serve for the remainder of the term vacated. No act of the commission is valid unless concurred in by a majority of its members. The commission shall select one of the members appointed by the governor to serve as chairman.

In accordance with this section, any justice, judge or magistrate of any court may be disciplined or removed for willful misconduct in office, persistent failure or inability to perform a judge's duties, or habitual intemperance, or he may be retired for disability seriously interfering with the performance of his duties that is, or is likely to become, of a permanent character. The commission may, after investigation it deems necessary, order a hearing to be held before it concerning the discipline, removal or retirement of a justice, judge or magistrate, or the commission may appoint three masters who are justices or judges of courts of record to hear and take evidence in the matter and to report their findings to the commission. After hearing or after considering the record and the findings and report of the masters, if the commission finds good cause, it shall recommend to the supreme court the discipline, removal or retirement of the justice, judge or magistrate.

The supreme court shall review the record of the proceedings on the law and facts and may permit the introduction of additional evidence, and it shall order the discipline, removal or retirement as it finds just and proper or wholly reject the recommendation. Upon an order for his retirement, any justice, judge or magistrate participating in a statutory retirement program shall be retired with the same rights as if he had retired pursuant to the retirement program. Upon an order for removal, the justice, judge or magistrate shall thereby be removed from office, and his salary shall cease from the date of the order.

All papers filed with the commission or its masters, and proceedings before the commission or its masters, are confidential. The filing of papers and giving of testimony before the commission or its masters is privileged in any action for defamation, except that the record filed by the commission in the supreme court continues privileged but, upon its filing, loses its confidential character, and a writing which was privileged prior to its filing with the commission or its masters does not lose its privilege by the filing. The commission shall promulgate regulations establishing procedures for hearings under this section. No justice or judge who is a member of the commission or supreme court shall participate in any proceeding involving his own discipline, removal or retirement.

This section is alternative to, and cumulative with, the removal of justices, judges and magistrates by impeachment and the original superintending control of the supreme court. (As added November 7, 1967; as amended November 7, 1978 and November 3, 1998.)