

JUDGE

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• Starting criminal and civil proceedings without an attorney representing the state.

• Not complying with certain Oregon states, rules and case law.

• Not considering and complying with rights and protections for victims.

• Making legal decisions that do not keep with local standards.

• Making release decisions that do not comply with Oregon laws or local standards.

• Having a “clear alignment with and preference for defendants and their attorneys in criminal matters.”

McDaniel in the memo provided at least two examples for each area.

In one instance, according to the memo, Williams started an arraignment hearing Sept. 23, 2019, for a failure-to-appear charge without the presence of chief deputy district attorney Greg Baxter, who was handling another

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Brian Harvey, La Grande Police Chief

matter at the request Circuit Judge Thomas Powers. When Baxter appeared before Williams, the judge relayed what the defendant said, adding the district attorney’s office could not use the statements against the defendant because they came from the judge. Williams also commented the failure to appear was an honest mistake and released the defendant.

Another example cited by McDaniel claims Williams ignored a victim’s rights in a domestic violence case on Dec. 3, 2019, when he released a defendant and allowed him to have phone contact with the victim, which the memo stated is a violation of Oregon law. And earlier this year in a sex abuse case involving a 6-year-old, Williams reduced a defendant’s bail

to the point he was able to get out of jail.

McDaniel listed a slew of cases to illustrate the claim Williams takes the side of the defense over the prosecution.

In one 2019 case, a La Grande man faced misdemeanor charges of menacing and disorderly conduct for starting a fight. While out on bail, according to the memo, the defendant went to a bar, drank, drove drunk and collided with two cars at Riverside Park, La Grande. The defendant pleaded guilty to driving under the influence of intoxicants, reckless driving and the original disorderly conduct charge. Williams then waived all fines except the \$100 bench probation fee, the memo stated, and while Williams found the defendant violated

his release, the judge discharged all the bail, stating “I think we owe you something” in reference to the defendant being a veteran.

La Grande Police Chief Brian Harvey said he supports the motion as a local law enforcement officer.

“I’ve been hearing things from my staff who go in to testify,” Harvey said. “And they say they see improper handling of cases by a judge.”

While the motion applies to one case so far, McDaniel said her office intends to file the motion on any case Williams may oversee. Williams and anyone who disagrees with the district attorney’s claims can file against the motion and receive a hearing. The deadline to challenge is May 5.

Michelle Leonard, trial court administrator for the 10th Judicial District, which encompasses Union and Wallowa counties, said the motion has not affected case scheduling. With COVID-19 restrictions in place, the courthouse has limited cases to one courtroom and one judge per week, which means Wil-

liams will continue to oversee criminal and civil proceedings. She said it’s too early to speculate on what the motion means going forward.

But local defense attorney Jared Boyd said granting the motion would “drastically change” how the criminal justice system in the county functions.

“We are eliminating one of only two judges in the Union and Wallowa County district, and we would have to bring in

visiting judges to fill that gap,” he said.

Williams cited the judiciary code of ethics in response to questions for comment, which states in part a judge should uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary and perform the duties of the office fairly, impartially and diligently.

“I hung these words above me when I first became a judge, and I read them every day,” Williams said.

GRADS

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Each vehicle may have just one graduate.

LHS Principal Brett Baxter said that not all families of seniors may have access to vehicles so the school’s staff will work with the community to get vehicles for them.

The school district, the city of La Grande and the Union County Sheriff’s Office will be working together to manage traffic during the procession.

The event will be live-streamed on the internet and each diploma hand-off will be shown. The live-stream will include images from a drone flying overhead.

Valedictory and guest speeches will be recorded along with a senior slideshow. All will be shown

later that evening at the La Grande Drive-In Theater for graduates and their families.

Only one car per graduate will be allowed.

Lifetouch Photography has been contracted with LHS to take graduation pictures. Baxter said other photographers will be avail-

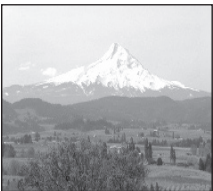
able to help families with photos.

The drive-thru graduation has been organized by the LHS Grad Planning team, which is composed of administrative staff, senior class advisers, senior student officers and representatives, and parents of seniors.

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Barry said he understands the need for more funding at local levels, and he would like to see more direct involvement from the county, even if the funding and assistance comes from the state and federal government.

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