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## NEWS

# Judge Casey Moreland reprimanded by state judicial board

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In a rare public rebuke to a sitting judge, the state board that investigates judicial misconduct has reprimanded Davidson County Judge Casey Moreland for his intervention in a June domestic violence case.

The judge's actions led to what police said was a Nashville woman being beaten and choked unconscious just a few hours after another attack by the same man.

In a three-page letter, the Tennessee Board of Judicial Conduct said Moreland violated three judicial canons and "detrimentally affected the integrity of the Judiciary."

Moreland called Judicial Commissioner Steve Holzapfel on June 8 to share information about prominent real estate developer David Chase, who had been charged with domestic assault.

Moreland had spoken with Chase's defense attorney — a personal friend. The judge's subsequent phone call led Holzapfel to free Chase from jail before a 12-hour domestic violence "cooling off" period.

Police said Chase attacked his girlfriend again.

The case rocked Nashville's criminal justice community and triggered reforms, both because of the close friendship between the judge and defense attorney Bryan Lewis, and in the way that the case illustrated a report critical of judges waiving the cooling-off period.

Designed to protect victims at a dangerous time, the 12-hour hold became mandatory in Davidson County after the Chase case. One of three designated domestic violence judges can still approve an early release, but only after a prosecutor, suspect and victim have a chance to be heard.

State lawmakers said they would introduce a bill to make holds mandatory.

On Thursday Moreland referred questions to his attorney, Ed Yarbrough.

"As far as we're concerned this is the final chapter in this episode," he said. "Judge Moreland indicated early on that he realized he had made a mistake, and he still feels that way.

"While not the most lenient punishment they can impose, (this) certainly is better than some of the alternatives."

The board found Moreland erred in three ways. It concluded that he did not comply with the law, did not promote confidence in the judiciary and abused the prestige of his office.

The finding that Moreland abused his powers could set a precedent in Tennessee, Yarbrough said.

"Most judges and lawyers did not understand, until now, that a judge should not talk to the commissioner in the way that it was done in this case," he said.

He said judges and commissioners communicate often. But the conduct board's reprimand could put a stop to situations in which a judge — who holds a higher office — influences a commissioner.

The Board of Judicial Conduct typically cannot disclose investigations or discipline. But by issuing a public reprimand of Moreland, the board chose one of its most severe options, though they stopped short of imposing any specific requirements on him. The board has taken such action only three other times this year and four times in 2013.

The board can't remove Moreland from the bench. Such action would have to come from the legislature and is reserved for the most severe misbehavior.

Despite widespread criticism, Moreland was re-elected as a general sessions judge in August without opposition. His re-election followed calls for his resignation by senators and a Metro councilwoman. The Metro Police chief and domestic violence advocates blasted the judge.

Moreland, a native Nashvillian, was first appointed to the bench by the Metro Council in 1995. He handled a majority of the more than 97,000 criminal cases that came through the General Sessions court in 2013.

## Charges still pending

The case against Chase, meanwhile, has become something of an escalating legal duel between the developer and ex-girlfriend Lauren Aletia Bull, with her prevailing on most of the points of conflict.

The man and woman each requested an order of protection. Judge Gale Robinson ruled in favor of Bull, requiring that Chase stay away from her for at least a year.

Police said Chase dragged the woman out of his apartment by her ponytail in the early morning of June 8. He was arrested and then released from jail hours later, returned home and broke Bull's phone and choked her until she lost consciousness, police said.

Chase faces charges of domestic assault, aggravated assault by strangulation, vandalism and interference with an emergency call. He is no longer represented by Lewis.

Chase's court filings have challenged police and accused the woman of making false statements and of attacking and stalking him.

But his legal trouble has mounted.

Separately in September, a different judge tripled Chase's bond on a DUI charge from 2012 after prosecutors said he violated the conditions of his bond for the third time by drinking heavily one day. He was wearing a court-ordered monitoring device at the time.

Chase was also indicted on DUI and implied consent charges stemming from a February arrest.

That same week, he stepped away from leading the Virgin Hotel construction project on Music Row.

Facing eight counts across the three cases, Chase is due in court later this month and again in November.

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**NOTE:** Judge Casey Moreland's attorney, [Ed Yarbrough](#), is the same attorney who later represented Judge Michael Binkley when he was arrested "during a prostitution sting on Dickerson Road in 2010."

An article by the Nashville Scene dated February 1, 2017, states, "According to the complaint, the charges against Binkley "were dismissed and expunged by Judge Casey Moreland on the very same day in a highly unusual manner, both in timing and procedure. Since that time, Attorney Lewis has boasted to a number of individuals that Judge Binkley 'owes' Attorney Lewis and Judge Moreland for 'fixing' the prostitution charges against Judge Binkley."