

State Bar recommends disbarment for Sulley

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It's the final nail in the coffin – so to speak – for Scott Sulley.

The State Bar of Arizona released a recommendation on Oct. 13 to disbar Sulley, the former City of Maricopa magistrate and justice of the peace for the Maricopa-Stanfield Justice Court.

The action follows that of the Arizona Supreme Court's decision Sept. 23 to remove Sulley from his JP position and ban him from serving on any other bench within Arizona for life.

"So much has been made of the fact that the money was missing," said Rick DeBruhl, chief communications officer with the State Bar of Arizona.

While the 15-page recommendation details the lost funds, most of the document focuses on Sulley's refusal to close expired warrants, resulting in the re-arrest of several people who were

previously incarcerated in the Pinal County Jail for the same incident.

More than anything, DeBruhl said, the wrongful incarceration of at least seven individuals is inexcusable.

"There were people that were actually thrown in jail," DeBruhl said.

On Aug. 8, the Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct determined Sulley not only failed to quash multiple warrants, but mismanaged files, inefficiently and ineffectively managed his court and calendar, prohibited clerk and staff training, created a hostile work environment, demonstrated poor demeanor, professionalism and decorum, and made discriminatory comments during his 10-year tenure.

Disbarment – especially of a judge – is a fairly rare occurrence.

The State Bar conducts nearly 1,000 investigations into attorney practices each year.

Out of 17,867 active attorneys in Arizona, 25 attorneys were disbarred last

year, up from 13 disbarments in 2012.

"We don't know yet if that is a trend or a blip," DeBruhl said. "We also saw 43 attorneys suspended in 2012, so it's possible that the court was taking a harder stand and giving less suspensions and more disbarments."

In 2013, an additional 28 lawyers were suspended from practicing temporarily and 26 received formal reprimands, a sanction the public can access, but that doesn't prevent the attorney from practicing.

The Arizona Supreme Court must review the State Bar's recommendation, but will likely approve the disbarment.

Teresa Georgini has been appointed interim city judge until the City of Maricopa decides who to hire to permanently replace Sulley for magistrate duties.

Independent Julia Gusse, Democrat Kevin Taylor and Republican Lyle Riggs are running for justice of the peace in the Nov. 4 general election.



Howard Waggner/Maricopa Monitor (2013)

Scott Sulley, center, speaks with State Rep. Steve Smith, right, and Maricopa Police chief Steve Stahl before the State of the City address in November 2013.

paying tribute

Local officials, residents honor those affected by domestic violence



Howard Waggner/Maricopa Monitor

The Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event Wednesday at Copper Sky Regional Park allowed residents the chance to pay tribute to domestic violence victims through a ceremony that included tying ribbons to a tree in honor of each of the DV victims in Maricopa this year alone – more than 300.

Local couple

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The pair helped out in a mentoring program at Tempe-based University Lutheran, and soon met a lesbian couple with kids in a unique situation.

"They both had parental rights as foster parents, but as soon as they adopted the children, only one of them could (have) rights," said Connolly, 55. "That's state law."

"It's terrible," Pochert, 66, added.

The Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act last summer, but lawyers told Connolly and Pochert that no lawsuit would be happening in Arizona.

So they let it go – until the encounter with the adopted children.

"If we weren't motivated by the other family with the kids, I don't know if we would have filed this based on ourselves," Connolly said. "I feel God has driven this entire process."

In early December 2013, they asked a fellow church member if he knew someone who would be willing to take on a lawsuit against the state of Arizona. Their lawyer friend considered the question for about a week, then came back with a surprise.

"I would like to take the case," he told them.

As the legal wheels started turning, more and more couples joined the lawsuit.

"When we started this whole thing, we were scared," Connolly said. "I feel like we became poster boys for marriage equality in Arizona, and it's not something we wanted."

Late Thursday afternoon, Joe Connolly reflected on the pending decision:

"Whenever the decision arrives, as people of faith, Terry and I hope everyone carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully take their own journey, in their own time and will plan a wedding that speaks to them, their families and friends.

"We wish for all couples to take their time, experience the joy of planning a wedding that celebrates and consummates their engagement with a celebration befitting their love. It is important to us that every couple celebrate with family and friends, something we were never able to do back in 2008 when we were under deadline to marry before the window of opportunity closed the following November in 2008."

And as opposition rose up, the pair struggled to understand the reasoning.

"I feel like this is a social justice issue out of our church," Connolly said.

What puzzles them most, however, is the view that private Christian law firm Alliance Defending Freedom, which the state of Arizona brought on to defend the suit, is fighting for Arizona's religious liberty.

For churches who don't agree with same-sex marriage, nothing will change, the pair argue.

"Nothing has changed as far as people's religious freedom," Pochert said. "Stable, life-long relationships are nothing but an asset to foster kids and adoptive kids (in) society."

"We are not gay rights activists," Connolly said. "If anything, I would merge two words together and call us 'faithtivists.'"

"Our case is not technically a religious issue," Pochert said. "Even though we see this as much of a religious issue, it's

really a civil suit that is filed against the state of Arizona."

Of course, there are other reasons Connolly and Pochert want Arizona to recognize their California union.

The burden of filing five tax returns, the possibility of denied hospital visits, trouble obtaining long-term insurance and taxes on partner health benefits – if they receive them at all – weigh on their minds, too.

But the couple insists those benefits take a backseat to the hardship their church friends face every day.

In the end, it all comes down to Judge John Sedwick, who is actually a visiting judge from the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska. He is also hearing the second Arizona case fighting for same-sex marriage, *Majors v. Jeanes*, which deals with death certificates of same-sex partners.

Ultimately, whether their legal team defeats the state is almost beside the point, the men said.

The real work – in churches, at individual homes, with broken families – has just begun.

"There's a lot of healing with this issue that needs to happen," Pochert said. "If there is a single suicide that can be prevented by healing somebody with this issue, it's all worth it."

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We've embraced Banner's mission to make a difference in people's lives through excellent patient care because it is nearly identical to our former mission and we know that the only thing changing is improving on our already excellent care delivery system.

Already you've probably noticed our signs have changed, we're refreshing our exterior paint, and we are changing internally as well. Our lobby is being completely refurbished and on **October 28**, we will unveil this first big milestone of becoming Banner.

So while we are getting a facelift, which at 30 years isn't a bad thing, our commitment to you, our community, remains the same – compassionate and caring health care.



If you can, drop by for our open house **5-7 p.m. Tuesday, October 28** in the new main lobby. I think you'll like what you see!

Sincerely,
Rona Curphy, CEO
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