

## **Alabama judiciary panel scolds judge who jailed man over yard signs**

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SKYLINE, Ala. — A man jailed for contempt for displaying yard signs critical of a Jackson County judge eventually got the signs back and was able to give the judge some advice — from a panel that investigates judges.

Circuit Judge Wallace Haralson said on March 17 that he received a letter from the state Judicial Inquiry Commission asking him "to be more judicious in the future toward arresting powers."

The letter stemmed from Haralson's order for Sheriff Mike Wells to arrest Phillip Dean of Skyline last August for yard signs criticizing the judge in a custody battle over Dean's two daughters.

One sign said: "Our court system is a joke," while others were critical of the judge for returning Dean's children to his ex-wife.

"I don't understand how the system can lock me up for a sign on my own private property," Dean told *The Huntsville Times* in a story yesterday.

The sign saying the "court system is a joke" remains in the yard, but several more were still put away yesterday. Dean said he planned to put the signs back in his front yard.

Dean said deputies took the signs from his property without a warrant and that he was jailed for about 12 hours after being arrested on Haralson's contempt order.

Dean said he was released and the signs were returned after his attorney told Haralson that the judge had violated Dean's free-speech rights. Dean said Haralson apologized soon after, although the judge said his comment was more like "I'm sorry I had to lock you up."

The attorney did not immediately return a phone message for comment yesterday.

Dean complained to the state Judicial Inquiry Commission about Haralson in December. Haralson said he received the letter from the JIC in February asking him to be more judicious about ordering arrests.

Haralson said the commission took no other action and exonerated him.

Dean said JIC Chairman Randall L. Cole, a DeKalb County circuit judge, informed him in a Feb. 3 letter that his complaint had received "serious attention and has resulted in appropriate action."

Cole said state law prevented the commission from disclosing its findings but that Dean's complaint "served a useful purpose."