

FORMAL REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION

Illinois Judicial Inquiry Board

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Date: June 25, 2026

Complainant: Janelle Babington Founder and CEO, Animal Victory 1319 Military Cutoff Road, Suite CC, Unit #101 Wilmington, NC 28405 Phone: 800-634-3439 Email: Info@animalvictory.org

Judge Complained Against: Sharon Arnold Kanter Associate Judge, Criminal Division Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois George N. Leighton Criminal Courthouse 2600 S. California Ave., Chicago, IL 60608

Case Information: Case Name: People of the State of Illinois v. Thomas Martel Case Number: 23CR0852301 County: Cook County, Illinois Type of Case: Criminal (Felony, Animal Torture, Aggravated Cruelty to Animals) Relationship to Case: Advocate and petitioner on behalf of 38,936 verified petition signatories

STATEMENT OF FACTS AND ALLEGED MISCONDUCT

I. Background

Thomas William Martel was arrested in July 2023 and charged with nine felony counts of animal torture and aggravated cruelty to animals in Wicker Park, Chicago, Illinois. He admitted to his girlfriend that he had been torturing and killing cats since he was eight years old and that he enjoyed doing so. Officers discovered the remains of multiple kittens in his home. The evidence was overwhelming and the confession was on record.

Animal Victory, a national animal advocacy organization that has fought for justice in over 390 animal cruelty cases, submitted a verified petition to the court and assigned prosecutors on seven separate occasions over nearly three years, with a combined total of 38,936 verified signatures. The Garrido Stray Rescue Foundation, a local Chicago rescue organization with over 22,700 community supporters, attended every court hearing and advocated publicly for accountability. Together, over 61,000 people demanded justice in this case.

II. The Conduct at Issue

Associate Judge Sharon Arnold Kanter was assigned to the Criminal Division of Cook County Circuit Court effective February 9, 2026, approximately four months before sentencing.

The Cook County State's Attorney's Office had previously offered a plea deal of 54 months, which it subsequently **withdrew** in order to pursue a full trial and conviction. Jury selection was scheduled and the case was prepared for trial.

On the morning of June 22, 2026, immediately before the jury was to be seated, **Judge Kanter announced from the bench that she would reinstate and honor the previously withdrawn plea agreement.** The prosecution, which had spent three years building its case and had explicitly withdrawn the plea deal in order to seek a stronger outcome, was left with no choice but to accept the reinstated deal. Thomas Martel immediately accepted.

As a direct result of this judicial decision:

- Martel pleaded guilty to one count of animal torture and one count of aggravated cruelty to animals.
- He was sentenced to 54 months (4.5 years), concurrent on both counts.
- He received 1,079 days of credit for time spent on electronic home monitoring, not in a prison cell, while awaiting trial.
- Illinois law then reduced the remaining sentence by 50%.
- **Result: Thomas Martel served zero days in an actual prison cell.**

Under Illinois law, the extended term maximum for the two counts he pleaded to was 16 years combined. Had he been convicted at trial on all nine original counts with consecutive sentencing, he could have faced up to 74 years in prison. Instead, he walked out of the courtroom free.

III. Basis for This Complaint

We respectfully submit that Judge Kanter's decision to unilaterally reinstate a plea agreement that had been formally withdrawn by the prosecution, on the morning of jury selection, after three years of case preparation, raises serious questions about the exercise of judicial discretion and the appearance of impartiality.

Specifically, we request the Board investigate whether Judge Kanter's conduct:

1. Constituted an abuse of judicial discretion in reinstating a withdrawn plea agreement over the objection of the prosecuting office, thereby eliminating the public's right to a trial and a full accounting of the facts.
2. Created the appearance of impropriety by intervening at the last possible moment to prevent a trial in a high-profile case that had drawn national public attention and over 61,000 petition signatures.

3. Reflected a failure to give appropriate weight to the interests of the community, the victims, and the public in a case involving a confessed serial animal torturer who admitted to enjoying the killing of animals since childhood.

We acknowledge that the Board has limited authority to review sentencing decisions and that judicial discretion is broad. However, we believe the totality of this decision, its timing, its effect, and its outcome, warrants formal review.

IV. Supporting Documentation

- Cook County State's Attorney's Office: StatesAttorney@CookCountySAO.org | (312) 603-1880
- Garrido Stray Rescue Foundation (attended all hearings): garridostrayrescue@gmail.com | <https://www.garridostrayrescue.org>
- CWB Chicago news report, June 2026: <https://cwbchicago.com/2026/06/wicker-parks-serial-kitten-killer-avoids-prison-with-last-minute-plea-deal.html>
- Sentencing document: Case 23CR0852301, signed by Judge Sharon Arnold Kanter, June 22, 2026
- Animal Victory petition: <https://animalvictory.org/petition/sign-shelly-kitten-killer-squeezed-drowned-and-microwaved-kittens-to-death/>

REQUESTED ACTION

We respectfully request that the Illinois Judicial Inquiry Board open a formal investigation into the conduct of Associate Judge Sharon Arnold Kanter in connection with Case Number 23CR0852301, and that the Board determine whether her decision to reinstate a withdrawn plea agreement on the morning of jury selection constituted judicial misconduct under the Illinois Code of Judicial Conduct.

We further request that the Board consider the broader pattern of public concern this case has generated, and whether the judicial system's handling of this matter warrants monitoring or further review.

Sincerely,

Janelle Babington Founder and CEO Animal Victory 1319 Military Cutoff Road, Suite CC, Unit #101 Wilmington, NC 28405 800-634-3439 Info@animalvictory.org