

Boing Boing The Youth Court of Pearl, Mississippi has been shut down and its judge, John Shirley (also a Republican Party activist) has been forced to resign after widespread disapproval of his decision to bar a mother from seeing her 4-month-old baby for 14 months over her unpaid court fees. The story began when the [...] Pearl Youth Court judge resigns, court permanently closed

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The Youth Court of Pearl, Mississippi has been shut down and its judge, John Shirley (also a Republican Party activist) has been forced to resign after widespread disapproval of his decision to bar a mother from seeing her 4-month-old baby for 14 months over her unpaid court fees.

The story began when the mother, who is African American, was passing through Pearl on a job-hunt. She was pulled over by local police, who found that she and the car's driver had outstanding warrants for misdemeanor offenses. She and the driver were arrested and the baby was declared "abandoned" by the arresting officer, despite the baby's grandmother arriving "within minutes" of the arrest.

Judge Shirley's court awarded custody to the grandmother, and issued an order prohibiting the mother from having any contact with her baby until the court fees were paid, an act that Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center director Cliff Johnson called "judicial kidnapping."

When the Center took on the mother's case and publicized it, Pearl Mayor Jake Windham shut down the Youth Court, and another judge vacated the no-contact order. Judge Shirley resigned before he could be fired, and insists that he resigned over differences with the mayor, and not because he knew he was about to be fired for gross misconduct.

Windham, a 16-year law enforcement veteran, said Thursday that Shirley has his facts wrong. He said the mayor and Board of Aldermen were presented with information and did an investigation.

"We acted under objective facts," Windham said. "It was simply

that we had to act on a situation to safeguard citizens and the city of Pearl.”

Windham said it is an unfortunate incident and he is sorry that Shirley is allowing his emotions to get the best of him.

All Pearl Youth Court cases will now be transferred to Rankin County Youth Court, Windham said

Pearl Youth Court judge resigns, court permanently closed [Jimmie E. Gates/The Clarion-Ledger]

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Decency, security, and liberty alike demand that government officials shall be subjected to the same rules of conduct that are commands to the citizen. In a government of laws, existence of the government will be imperiled if it fails to observe the law scrupulously. Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or for ill, it teaches the whole people by its example. Crime is contagious. If the government becomes a lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for law; it invites every man to become a law unto himself; it invites anarchy. To declare that in the administration of the criminal law the end justifies the means—to declare that the government may commit crimes in order to secure the conviction of a private criminal—would bring terrible retribution. Against that pernicious doctrine this court should resolutely set its face. US vs Olmstead