

Brethren,

In September of 2025, Most Worshipful Brother Margroff issued an edict reinstating Right Worshipful Brothers Gary Olsen, Jose Villalta, and Mike Holt. In doing so, he expressed his belief that sufficient time had been served during their four-year expulsions and that the punishment imposed had been excessive in relation to the offenses. Especially since in other cases with similar or worst offenses, the offenders did not receive as harsh a penalty.

Upon my assuming office as Grand Master, I chose to temporarily extend that edict. I did so despite at least one threatened lawsuit intended to discourage my extension. My decision was made so that I could take the necessary time to fully review the matter, consult with Past Grand Masters, speak with my leadership team and legal counsel, and carefully consider what course of action would best serve New Jersey Freemasonry as a whole — not any individual, nor any particular side of this long-standing conflict.

To understand where we stand today, it is important to briefly revisit how this situation began.

The origins of this matter can be traced to campaign conduct during the 2017, 2018, and 2019 election cycles, which created significant disharmony and hostility within the elected line of Grand Lodge leadership.

In 2020, Approximately three months into his term, Most Worshipful Monicelli invoked Landmark 3 to extend his service as Grand Master of New Jersey giving himself a second year. This has been debated as being unconstitutional and possibly violating Landmark 3 itself, since MW Monicelli allowed the votes for other elected positions like trustees but not Grand Master or the other elected line offices. Landmark 3 also states “The Grand Master is Elected by the Craft,...). MW Monicelli could have explained his reason for wanting an additional year and asked the brethren to re-elect him. This would have allowed him to get the same outcome without invoking Landmark 3 and taking that vote away from the brothers.

This decision created additional friction within the elected line, particularly between Right Worshipful Gary Olsen and the Grand Master. Several months later, in December of 2021, MW Brother Monicelli removed RW Brother Olsen from his office as the duly elected Senior Grand Warden. The reasons cited at the time was that

RW Olsen refused to travel outside the state and concerns related to certain jurisdictional events like trustee meetings. .

Since that time, brethren have further debated whether removing a duly elected Grand Lodge officer — effectively overturning the vote of the Craft — was consistent with our Constitution. At present, there is not enough agreement within the fraternity to prove that action was unconstitutional.

Several Past Grand Masters counseled the GM against this action. One well respected PGM was admonished harshly when he spoke up and attempted to encourage a peaceful resolution. The PGMs expressed concern that removing an elected officer could create lasting division within the Craft. In hindsight, those concerns proved very true, as the fraternity has spent the past several years working to recover and heal from the aftermath of that decision.

Let me be clear: it is not my intention to reopen debate regarding Landmark 3. That authority exists because a Grand Master must sometimes act decisively for the good of the fraternity when a Grand Lodge session cannot be convened. Our system therefore depends upon electing good men to exercise that authority wisely, and not abusing it. But when that power is abused, our system and leaders of it, should hold that Grand Master accountable through proper Masonic processes after their term has concluded.

Following his removal, RW Brother Olsen's nomination to run for a grand lodge office the following year was also forbidden. This action likewise became the subject of debate among brethren who believed it too to be unconstitutional by limiting both a brother's right to seek office and the Craft's right to determine its leadership through election.

In response, Brother Olsen became publicly vocal, including on social media. Right Worshipful Brother Jose Villalta and others also publicly and unmasonically criticized the Grand Master and elected officers. Brother Olsen also circulated a petition throughout the Craft outlining his concerns and calling for the removal of the Grand Master.

Brother Villalta was subsequently suspended for unmasonic conduct due to public social media postings. Right Worshipful Mike Holt made statements encouraging members not to pay dues and suggesting the formation of a new Grand Lodge. These actions were likewise ruled unmasonic, resulting in his suspension.

Because our Constitution and By-Laws provide no formal mechanism for removing a sitting Grand Master, RW Olsen calling for that action was also deemed unmasonic, leading to Brother Olsen's suspension.

The three brothers were then brought to trial before a Special Lodge of Judgment rather than through their respective Blue Lodges. This was done citing a historical precedent loosely established by the 1983 court case Rutledge vs. Gulian. Each brother responded differently to the proceedings: RW Brother Villalta did not attend due to a scheduling conflict and was found guilty and expelled; RW Brother Olsen appeared briefly, and after a statement was made and some conflict erupted, he departed and was likewise found guilty and expelled; RW Brother Holt completed the full trial process and initially received a minimum 2 year suspension.

That decision was later appealed by MW Tucker who was the original complainant. Following the appeal process, an appeals committee, appointed by MW Tucker, reviewed and overturned the 2 year suspension of RW Mike Holt and replaced it with expulsion.

After their expulsions, believing they had no remaining recourse, the three brothers again voiced criticism on social media. Over the past 2 years, these activities gradually subsided.

Shortly after his installation, MW Brother MarGroff sought to gauge the sentiment of Past Grand Masters and the broader Craft regarding possible reinstatement of RW Olsen, Holt and Villalta. At the November 2025 Grand Lodge session, he explored bringing the matter before the brethren for a majority or $\frac{2}{3}$ vote. Significant opposition arose, particularly from those involved in the original proceedings. It was further argued that no clear constitutional process exists for Grand Lodge to reinstate expelled members, and that if a vote was called for, it must mimic a vague blue lodge process of Unanimous vote to reinstate a member. MW MarGroff feeling that a unanimous vote of grand lodge was impractical given the history of this matter, especially since it would mean a unanimous vote including all Past masters and top 3 officers of all Lodge's.

I also believe matters of this magnitude are best addressed by the brethren whenever possible. However, Since there is no defined formal constitutional process, the responsibility has instead fallen upon each Grand Master to decide annually whether to issue, ignore or continue edicts concerning reinstatement.

I do not believe it is fair or healthy for our fraternity to revisit this issue year after year. In my view, what began as a personal conflict between groups of brothers escalated into this mess that has cost this fraternity dearly. At multiple moments along the way, actions on all sides could have prevented further harm to the fraternity. Unfortunately, the desire to win on both sides, outweighed the desire to preserve harmony.

Expulsion should always be a last resort. Removing Masonry entirely from a brother's life is among the most serious actions we can take. While I in no way condone any of the public and unmasonic conduct that occurred, I unfortunately can understand the sense of frustration and helplessness that can arise when a person believes they have no remaining avenue and when actions are taken that you deem an unfair abuse of power. I say this with humility, having personally experienced several incidents of abuse of power during my own two year candidacy for Junior Grand Warden. At several points there was favoritism from leadership shown towards other candidates, unmasonic restriction of my actions, and threats to remove me and or suspend me without proper cause, with the specific intention to remove me from the race. Those unmasonic actions could have prevented me from having the honor to stand here today in service of this amazing jurisdiction as your Grand Master.

That is not Freemasonry and it has no place in our fraternity.

After careful reflection, I have determined the following course of action:

Right Worshipful Brothers Olsen, Holt, and Villalta will be granted sixty (60) days to seek membership in another recognized jurisdiction outside of New Jersey and also seek a demit from each lodge that they are members of. Since there is no official way to fairly have the brothers vote on this matter, this action will allow these brothers to continue their Masonic journey without fear, while also allowing our jurisdiction the opportunity to move forward, heal, and close this unfortunate chapter.

I recognize that this decision will not be a popular solution for either side involved but I believe it is the best decision for OUR fraternity. And any decision where no one side is happy is as fair a decision as we can get.

I could have taken the easy road out and extended the edict to the end of the year and kicked this can down the road for the next Grand Master to deal with, but I have never been known to take the easy road. But more importantly you didn't elect me to do the easy thing, you elected me to try to do the right thing.