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The Editors Say

US Attorney Deirdre M. Daly: Investigation of corrupt CT courts

News

by **Jim Picht** - Feb 5, 2015

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The DOJ announces formation of investigative task force following writers two-year coverage of corruption by Communities Digital News

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Dying for custody (Part 1): DOJ announces investigation into Connecticut court programs

Life Family by Anne Stevenson - Jan 21, 2015

NEWS

February 4, 2015

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**CDN Writer
Anne Stevenson
Uncovers Connecticut
Court Corruption**

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NEW HAVEN, Conn., February 5, 2015 — The U.S. Department of Justice and representatives of five federal law enforcement agencies announced this week the establishment of a public corruption task force in the State of Connecticut. The task force will investigate corrupt public officials, the misuse of public funds and related criminal activity. [DOJ Feb 4 – Task Force Announcement](#)

Some state officials have suggested that the task force's first order of business should be to address problems with fraud and corruption in the State's family courts. According to the Connecticut Judicial Review Council's website, the 25 member committee has fielded tens of thousands of complaints filed by consumers against Connecticut judges, however, fewer than 11 judges have been subject to public disciplinary hearings since the 1980's.

"Public servants are entrusted by all of us to act in the best interests of the public they serve. It is important for the United States to bring to justice those who betray that trust," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Patricia M. Ferrick. "Public corruption at all levels of local, state, and federal government must not be tolerated, and this task force will leverage the best assets of the task force partner agencies to address the threat posed by corrupt public officials."

According to a press release sent out by U.S. Attorney Deirdre M. Daly, the Connecticut Public Corruption

Task Force is a joint initiative which includes representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Postal Inspection Service, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, and the Inspector General's Offices of the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The announcement comes on the heels of several recent State legislative hearings, during which hundreds of Connecticut families claimed to have been victimized by corrupt public officials working within the State's courts and the Department of Children and Families.

During a recent hearing before the Connecticut State Legislature's Judicial Committee, State Representative Minnie Gonzalez (D-Hartford) and 17 other State legislators cited dishonesty and corruption as a reason why they opposed Judge Stephen Frazzini's reappointment to the State Court bench.

On January 23, Rep. Gonzalez questioned Judge Frazzini about his membership in the state chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Court. The controversial trade association and vendor to the judicial branch was founded by Connecticut family court administrators, judges, and the professionals who appear before them in court.



Specifically, Rep. Gonzalez asked Frazzini whether he should have recused himself from hearing a controversial case during which he issued a gag order against the Connecticut Law Tribune. He did this at the request of the mother's attorney, AFCC member Stephen Dembo, and at the recommendation of CT AFCC founding board member Susan Cousineau, the guardian ad litem assigned to the case.

Days later, Frazzini issued an order sua sponte, effectively reversing his own decision after the Connecticut Supreme Court agreed to hear the Tribune's appeal as to whether the ban was a violation of the publication's First Amendment rights.

In response to Gonzalez's question, Frazzini testified that he was not a member of the CT AFCC, that he has never attended a meeting, that he doesn't know the chapter's membership, and that he did not even know whether a local chapter had "gotten off the ground."

Yet according to documentation filed with the Secretary of State's Office in 2013, founding board members of the CT AFCC include some of Frazzini's close colleagues, including former Chief Family Court Administrative Judges Lynda Munro and Judge Gerard Adelman, and Frazzini's coworkers Judge Holly Aberly-Wetstone, Court Support Services Division (CSSD) Regional Managers Debra Kulak and Phyllis Cummings-Teixeira, and Court Operations Manager Marilou Giovannucci.

Less than a week later, **Frazzini issued a letter to the legislature** recanting this testimony and admitting that he had made a payment to his co-worker's corporation in 2012, but since then has paid dues only to the national AFCC organization.

"I placed a call to the national AFCC in Chicago this morning and was advised that my payment of dues to the national organization has also included membership dues for the Connecticut chapter of the AFCC."

Connecticut taxpayer Michael Nowacki, who opposed Frazzini's reappointment to the bench says Frazzini is not telling the truth.

"What is amazing is that Frazzini lies again in the letter when he said he contacted the national organization in Chicago," says Nowacki. "The AFCC headquarters are in Madison, Wisconsin."

Nowacki also points out that the CT AFCC did not receive a tax identification number from the IRS until 2014, nearly two years after Frazzini started sending money to his coworker's company. More importantly, Nowacki wonders whether the DOJ's new task force will be able to discover who else has paid the CT AFCC, how the judge's company has spent their money, and whether the company's proprietors have complied with the law.

Last year, Nowacki was one of nearly 100 parents with open family court cases who courageously testified before the legislature that they were victimized by predatory court professionals, many of whom were AFCC affiliates allegedly engaged in case rigging, healthcare scams, false billing scams, mortgage fraud, extortion, and other types of misconduct through the State's publicly funded programs and services.

For now, U.S. Attorney Daly is crediting "dogged journalists," as well as courageous politicians and members of the public for coming forward with valuable information about the corruption in the state, and has encouraged citizens to report corrupt activity by calling into a hotline that was recently established by the agency for this purpose.

"We cannot overstate the importance of citizen participation in our fight against corruption, and we urge all citizens to assist us in this effort."

Communities Digital News investigative reporter Anne Stevenson has lead that "dogged media" effort, reporting on this issue in more than 30 articles on corruption in the courts for **Communities Digital News since early 2013**.

Sources tell Communities Digital News that Stevenson's article, [Dying for custody \(Part 1\): DOJ announces investigation into Connecticut court programs](#), helped to increase awareness of the situation to the DOJ.

"Anne Stevenson's efforts to shine a light on the corruption in the court system should be applauded," says Jacquie Kubin, President of Communities Digital News. "Her work has brought many chilling and unacceptable situations that have harmed American families under the bright light of independent media."

The DOJ was asked for a comment on Stevenson's article, but they let their reference to "dogged media" stand. Stevenson's body of work stands to show that she has "barking rights" to exposing the mistruths and mis-justices being perpetuated by the Connecticut courts.

"I have been moved by the individual stories of the families and the harm they have suffered at the hands of the courts," Stevenson says. "The stories of greed and miscarriages of justice, many that have gravely harmed children and parents, are heartbreaking."



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Jim Picht

James Picht is the Senior Editor for Communities Politics. He teaches economics and Russian at the Louisiana Scholars' College in Natchitoches, La. After earning his doctorate in economics, he spent several years doing economic development work in Moscow and the new independent states of the former Soviet Union for the U.S. government, the Asian Development Bank, and as a private contractor.

He has also worked in Latin America, the former USSR and the Balkans as an educator, teaching courses in economics and law at universities in Ukraine and at finance ministries throughout the region. He has been writing at the Communities since 2009.

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