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Judge accused of harboring fugitive ex-boyfriend defends herself before N.J.

Supreme Court

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New Jersey's first Filipino-American Superior Court judge defended herself before the state's top court Tuesday, arguing that she had not concealed her fugitive boyfriend from police years ago.

A judicial ethics panel previously recommended Middlesex County Superior Court Judge Carlia Brady be fired.

Brady told the state Supreme Court that she took "full responsibility" for unknowingly falling in love with a wanted man, and she acknowledged that she should have called a supervisor for advice after she found out her boyfriend was suspected of robbing a pharmacy.

"I ask this court for forgiveness for any lapse in judgement," she said.

But Brady strongly defended what she told Woodbridge police at the time, and she accused the department of concealing her cooperation.

Maureen Bauman, a lawyer representing the ethics panel, said the judge violated her oath and could no longer be trusted.

"There's nothing else that would protect the public in this instance, short of removal," Bauman said.

It is relatively rare for a judge to be kicked off the bench. The ethics panel only reports six since 2008, most of them from municipal courts.

Brady's case has dragged on so long that one of her former attorneys, Walter Timpone, is now one of the Supreme Court's seven justices. Timpone left the courtroom before the hearing began, and he was not present during arguments. His office did not immediately respond to a question about whether he had recused himself.

Brady was first arrested in 2013, early in her tenure as a Superior court judge. Woodbridge police accused her of harboring her then live-in boyfriend, Jason Prontnicki. (Prontnicki is still behind bars on robbery and weapons charges, according to department of corrections records.)

The state Supreme Court suspended her, and a grand jury later indicted her on three charges, including hindering an investigation.

One charge was dismissed in 2017, and the rest were dropped in 2018 when an appeals court ruled that Prontnicki couldn't be forced to testify against her.

Brady was reinstated in 2018, and she filed a lawsuit against Woodbridge police last year, arguing that their actions against her amounted to a racist and sexist "witch hunt."

Messages left with Woodbridge police were not immediately returned, and the lawsuit is ongoing.

Despite the dropped charges, the Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct concluded that the judge's actions were still wrong.

Brady was dishonest with investigators, the committee wrote in a 58-page report, permanently hurting her credibility.

The judge disputed many of the allegations, and Tuesday's hearing was specifically about Brady's request to have the committee's recommendations thrown out.

Brady said her boyfriend both called her and violently forced his way into her home while he was on the run, but she stressed she followed police instructions about how to report him. She said she left two voicemails with cops, and she accused officers of only releasing edited copies of those messages while improperly destroying the originals, which would have showed that she was helping locate Prontnicki.

In response, Bauman said the released voicemails were not manipulated. When questioned about their authenticity, Bauman directed justices to an audio expert.

Some justices appeared skeptical of both Brady's claim that she had done almost nothing wrong, and the committee's recommendation to fire the judge.

About a dozen of Brady's supporters sat quietly on one side of the courtroom during the hour-long hearing. Both Brady and Bauman declined comment afterward.

No timeline was given for when justices will make a decision. Brady's term ends in one month, on April 5, and she will need to be re-nominated by the governor and approved by the state Senate to continue.