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LAWSUIT TURNS THE TABLES ON THE TAX-PAID OFFICIALS WHO MADE UP A CRIME TO SILENCE JUDICIAL CANDIDATE

by Family Forward Advocacy May 2, 2024

6–8 minutes

Connie Reguli, J.D.

A lawsuit filed in the Tennessee Middle District Court on May 1, 2024, is an "I told you so" from Williamson County 2022 judicial candidate Connie Reguli. The Complaint details how the criminal justice system in Williamson County, Tennessee was manipulated to create a fake crime to interfere with the local election. Reguli's felony convictions from April 20, 2022 were reversed in the Court of Appeals on

March 4, 2024. This civil rights lawsuit exposes the coordinated efforts of judges, district attorneys, police officials, and children's services to shut down their biggest challenger.

In the spring of 2022, the Williamson County primary elections were gaining public interest when the news exploded with the felony conviction of the juvenile court judicial candidate who was opposing the incumbent, Sharon Guffee. On April 20, 2022, local attorney Connie Reguli was convicted of accessory after the fact of felony custodial interference when she allegedly interfered with the Department of Children's Services efforts to take her client's child in Dekalb County. Reguli wasn't a novice at wrangling against the department, for 28 years she had been defending parents against an overaggressive government agency all across the State of Tennessee.

News ran wild about Reguli's conviction which just happened to completely coincide with the early voting schedule and was just two weeks before the county primary. The local Williamson Herald, the Tennessean, and investigative reporter Jeremy Finley with WSMV rushed to publish stories about the conviction and the resulting automatic suspension of Reguli's law license. When Reguli was interviewed by Tennessee Conservative News, she told them it was a 'fake felony' and that Judge Joseph A. Woodruff and District Attorney Kimberly Helper had manipulated the language in the Tennessee written law to remove an essential element of the crime which was the only way they could create this bogus crime. She said it was all done to shut her up, interfere with the election, and allow Williamson County to proceed with its two hundred and eighty-one million dollars juvenile 'kiddie' jail without being questioned by the public.

Reguli's campaign hammered incumbent juvenile court Judge Sharon Guffee in print and emails, including Guffee's decisions to put children in solitary confinement and suggestions that video evidence from her juvenile detention center was concealed. Reguli relentlessly outed the new 'kiddie jail' which was to be funded, in part, by private equity and include forty-eight mental health beds. Reguli said,

"I guarantee you this, if private equity is involved, the county must make a profit on the heads of children." Shutting down Reguli's campaign was a must.

Kimberly Helper and Mary Katherine Evins

This civil rights lawsuit names Connie Reguli and her client, Wendy Hancock, as plaintiffs. The defendant line-up includes District Attorneys Kimberly Helper and Mary Katherine Evins, Brentwood Police Department's Lori Russ and David O'Neil, and a state attorney employed in the Department of Children's Services, Tracy Hetzel. The complaint alleges that the investigation was initiated in October 2018 by Hetzel who had just managed to get a secret court order to remove the 12-year-old daughter of Reguli's client, Ms. Hancock. Hetzel met with Russ, O'Neil, and Evins in October 2018. Three of the four government employees in that meeting

were lawyers. That was when they cooked up a plan to prosecute Reguli and her client, Hancock, by scratching out an essential element of the crime of custodial interference. Russ used this fake investigation to obtain a secret search warrant on Reguli's social media Facebook along with all of her private messages, IP addresses, emails, and deleted content.

In June 2019, after fighting with DCS for ten months, Ms. Hancock's daughter was brought home and dropped off at the doorstep. A month later, Reguli and Hancock were arrested on the secret indictment for custodial interference and accessory to a felony. Only it was not a crime. It was never a crime. Nevertheless, Helper, Evins, Russ, O'Neil, and Hetzel all continued to feed into the judicial system a false narrative that Reguli and Hancock were felons. Two full-blown jury trials took place eating up hours of valuable court time and state-funded services. The entire Dekalb County Clerk's staff, District Attorney Kim Helper, Judge Joseph A. Woodruff and his staff, drug task force prosecutor Sean Duddy, and DCS deputy general counsel Sophia Crawford all came to watch the trial. Thousands of tax dollars were sunk into this pit of a fake felony all to silence Reguli.

Judge Joseph A. Woodruff

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The Complaint describes how Reguli had been an activist as well as a lawyer for years, seeking reform of the Tennessee judicial system and the Department of Children's Services for years. Reguli appeared in public forums, lobbied legislators, and engaged others in telling their stories about abuses in the court system. Her criticism of DCS and the local district attorney's office may have gotten under their proverbial government-official-thin-skin because when they had the opportunity to arrest and charge Reguli with a crime, albeit a fake crime, they jumped right in.

The Complaint also describes the tactics used by these government employees as psychological weapons, including triangulation, gaslighting, passive aggressive, scapegoating, projection, lying, sabotage, and isolation, explaining how this perverted attack on Reguli and Hancock was intended to weaken them physically and psychologically. The Complaint asks for a jury trial and $520 million in damages.

Connie Reguli is represented by Attorney Larry L. Crain in Brentwood, Tennessee. Wendy Hancock is represented by Attorney Lorraine Wade in Smyrna, Tennessee.

Case 3:24-cv-00541 Reguli et al v. Hetzel et al, Middle District Court, Nashville, Tennessee

https://dockets.justia.com/docket/tennessee/tnmdce/3:2024cv00541/99331