

Report: Judge funneled cases to favored attorney

Associated Press

CLEVELAND | A defense attorney routinely had cases assigned to him by a judge who now says she was unaware of the practice and blames a bailiff, *The Plain Dealer* reported on Sunday.

Records show that since 2001, Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Judge Shirley Strickland Saffold has taken the cases of at least 130 poor defendants from the public defender and given more than 100 of them to Richard Agopian.

Saffold has approved \$57,300 in fees for Agopian in those cases, records show, all from public money, *The Plain Dealer* reported.

According to the newspaper, Saffold initially defended the moves, saying in a Nov. 13 letter that they were made in the interests of justice and may have saved taxpayers money.

But on Friday, she said she had been unaware of the circumstances investigated by the newspaper and blamed her bailiff for steering defense work.

In a letter to the chief judge, Saffold said she indefinitely suspended her longtime bailiff, Lawrence Wallace. He said Friday that he had switched the public-defender cases to Agopian.

"I take responsibility for that," he said.

A message seeking comment was left at her office on Sunday.

In addition to the public-defender switches, records show that since 2001, Saffold has assigned 62 cases to Agopian that were rejected or surrendered by other private lawyers. She has approved \$36,200 in "fees for Agopian in those cases.

Two months ago, the chief judge criticized Saffold for diverting cases, telling her that it created the impression "that our judges are unwilling to follow our own rules and shows also a pattern of favoritism.

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"The perception that it creates is terrible," Judge Richard McMonagle wrote Saffold in September after the newspaper inquired about the

practice.

While acknowledging that she had appointed Agopian "in more instances than I probably should have," Saffold told McMonagle that challenging the practice in writing was "unnecessary and vile."

Saffold, in a letter responding to questions from *The Plain Dealer*, said she had removed public defenders when they failed to perform.

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She replaced them with "well-qualified, in fact, extremely well-qualified attorneys," Saffold said, and saved money by limiting publicly funded appeals claiming poor legal representation.

Saffold said that she had no personal relationship with any appointed attorney and has received nothing for the assignments.

Agopian, 57, said that he cannot explain why he has received so many cases from Saffold, except that she knows him to be an aggressive advocate.

He said he provides a diligent defense for all clients, no matter who is paying the bill, and earns his money through hard work.

[From the Dayton Daily News: 11.24.2003]

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The National Organization for Men Enemy #1

Cayahoga County (Cleveland) Judge Shirley Strickland Saffold

Judge advises defendant on how to marry a doctor

She denied actually urging the woman to marry or pickup a Doctor, even though, that appears twice in the official court transcript.

"I was telling her her boyfriends a bum," the Judge said "I think she's a nice kid. I was telling her her choice was the wrong choice. She was a young kid with no prior record. She has a chance to be productive, and I would hope you would not use her name"

Asked if any of her illustrations were legitimate choices, Saffold declared'. "Your taking what I said out of context. Obviously, that's what your intentions are."

Saffold insisted her only aim was to tell the young woman she had choices.

Diana Cyganovich, executive director of Templum House, said that if that was the judge's Intent, she sent the wrong message.

I think the judge was trying to do what most judges try to do and that is make a point," Cyganovich said.

But Cyganovich, whose nonprofit organization fights domestic violence, said she was "somewhat surprised at just how insensitive some of the statements are."

While acknowledging that "uyas trvipqjQ do poop*" ' Cvaanovich said, "I don't think we should tolerate those kinds of statements from anyone in our society, whether they are a judge or a doctor or a person on the street."

Saffold, 45, was elected to the Common Pleas bench in 1994, after seven years as a Cleveland Municipal judge.

**Judge advises marrying a doctor
Female defendant lectured about men.**

CLEVELAND, A Cayhoga County judge advised a female defendant that she needed a better

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man in *her* life, and trying the library of a local medical school was one way to find him. Common Pleas judge Shirley Strickland Saffold herself married to a doctor told 19 year old Katie Nemeth at a sentencing this week that she should look for Dr. Right and went on in earthy language to lay out the facts of life as she saw them.

Nemeth had pleaded guilty Monday to misuse of a credit card, a misdemeanor.

Terry Gilbert, Nemeth's lawyer, said yesterday that Nemeth had worked in a store where a customer had lost a credit card. He said Nemeth's boyfriend ended up with the card and made some purchases, but he later repaid the owner.

Nemeth pleaded guilty to a minor charge to resolve the case, and paid a \$200.00 fine.

But Saffold went beyond the fine, lecturing Nemeth on how to straighten out her life, according to a transcript of the hearing.

Saffold told Nemeth that every woman in prison she had interviewed told her she was there because of a man.

"Life is about choices," Saffold said from the bench. "You can be with him (her current boyfriend) or you can go sit over in the medical school and act like your studying and *rene*"ef one of those doctors. You see what I mean?"

The judge advised Nemeth to take a textbook and pretend to read it. "When one of them (medical students) walks by, say excuse me, could you tell me what this means?" the judge said. "You get yourself a date."

"Men are easy," Saffold warned. "You can go sit at the bus stop, put on a short skirt, cross your legs and pick up 25. Ten of them will give you their money. It's the truth."

Saffold went on to tell Nemeth "If you don't pick up the first ten, then all you got to do is open your legs a little bit and cross them at the bottom and then they'll stop."

The judge again urged Nemeth to go to CWRU and pick up a doctor. "Marry a doctor lickety split," she said before imposing the fine.

Gilbert would not comment on the judge's remarks and his client could not be reached.

Saffold protested last night that her remarks were taken out of context.

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