

False and Deceitful Campaign Accusations Charged Against Prosecutor

March 25, 2014 - Court News, Politics, This Just In! - Tagged: 20/20, ABC News, Attorney Grievance Commission, Chris Wallace, Circuit Court Judge Joe Weiner, David Densford, George Meng, George Sparling, H. L. Mencken, John A Mattingly Jr., Joseph A. Mattingly Jr., Joseph Stanalonis, Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich, MDJCCC, misconduct, rape, Richard Fritz, Shane Mattingly, Walter B Dorsey - no comments

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Lies, Smears and False Charges by Prosecutor as he sought to oust Judge Could Lead to Him Being Disbarred

By Ken Rossignol
THE CHESAPEAKE TODAY

UPPER MARLBORO, MD. — A complaint against Senior St. Mary's County Assistant States Attorney Joseph Stanalonis has been filed in the Circuit Court of Prince Georges County by the Attorney Grievance Commission. The charges were placed on Feb. 5th

but not posted on the court records online until this month after St. Mary's Circuit Court Judge Mike Stamm recused himself from hearing the case and Maryland's Chief Judge assigned the case to a Prince George County Judge.



In short, according to the charges brought against Stanalonis, it's actually illegal for a lawyer to lie. Who knew?

The public may understandably believe that lying, falsifying and spinning the truth is a fact of life in politics, but when a lawyer does it when running for office, he just might find himself in deep legal trouble.

A copy of the complaint was obtained by **The Chesapeake Today** and the filing calls for "Disciplinary or Remedial Action Against Respondent Joseph Michael Stanalonis" and lays out a pattern of false accusations made by his election campaign towards Circuit Court Judge David Densford, whom Stanalonis was challenging in the 2012 election.

Under the heading of "Complaint of Bar Counsel", the following accusations were outlined:

"During the 2012 election for a seat on the St. Mary's County Circuit Court, Respondent campaigned against the Honorable David W. Densford. During the campaign, on April 20, 2012, the Maryland Judicial Campaign Conduct Committee, Inc. (hereinafter "MDJCCC") received a complaint from attorney George E. Meng regarding the campaign conduct of Respondent. The complaint alleged that a campaign flyer distributed by the Stanalonis campaign contained misleading statements and images. MDJCCC investigated the complaint and found that Respondent, in the campaign's use of this flyer, violated several provisions of MDJCCC'S Standards for the Conduct of Contested Judicial Elections. The conduct MDJCCC found to be in violation of these standards involved conduct that also violated the Maryland Lawyer's Rules of Professional Conduct.

"Respondent's campaign knowingly misled voters with the flyer statement that Judge Densford, "as judge, has never sentenced a single criminal to jail." Judge Densford was appointed on December 22, 2011, and sworn in as an associate judge of the Circuit Court for St. Mary's County on February 3, 2012. The flyer was prepared in February, shortly after Judge Densford was sworn in, and circulated in March and April, a period of time in which Judge Densford had not yet been assigned a criminal sentencing. Therefore, at the time the statements were circulated, Judge Densford had not yet had the opportunity to sentence a convicted criminal. The statement unfairly calls Judge Densford's integrity into question and falsely and misleadingly represents Judge Densford's record.

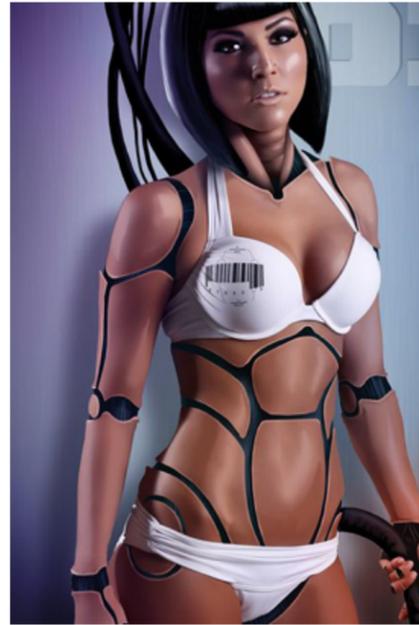
"Respondent's campaign intended to mislead voters with the statement on the flyer that Judge Densford "opposes your right to elect judges" when, as the MDJCCC found, Judge Densford has consistently supported the right of Maryland citizens to elect circuit court judges. MDJCCC found that Respondent's campaign intended to mislead voters with the statement. MDJCCC found that Respondent's campaign intended to create the false impression that Judge Densford opposed the practice of elections for circuit court judges, when, based upon Judge Densford's previous voting record in support of judicial elections and his then-current noncommittal public stance, he had never done so.

"Respondent's campaign also misled voters by stating on the flyer that Judge Densford opposed registration of convicted sex predators. Respondent's campaign relied upon Judge Densford's experience as a defense attorney, prior to becoming a judge, and specifically, Judge Densford's representation of criminal defendants in cases in which their convictions subjected them to registration under Maryland's sexual offender laws. The statement is knowingly false, as Judge Densford never opposed the statutory scheme for registration of convicted sex offenders and thus misrepresents Judge Densford's record.

"Petitioner represents and charges by his actions and omissions set forth above, Respondent engaged in professional misconduct in violation of the following Maryland Lawyer's Rules of Professional Conduct, as adopted by Maryland Rule 16-812.

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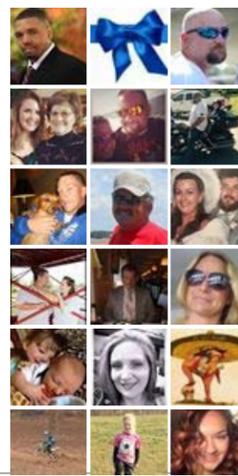
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C. Take such other and further action as this Court may deem just and proper u

Stanalonis, supported by Republicans and Densford, who was appointed to the Democratic Governor Martin O'Malley; were a striking contrast of views on poli the law in the 2012 race for the circuit court judgeship.

Stanalonis had been a prosecutor since passing the bar in 1996 and Densford l criminal defense attorney who had been passed over three times before when l judgeship.

An election-year rump group of lawyers, judges and political figures, typical of e formed in 2012 when Circuit Court Judge David Densford had to stand for elect appointed to the bench by Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley.

One legal expert termed the group as simply a bunch of lawyers and judges for of protecting the exclusive and private club of politically connected attorneys as Maryland.

Maryland Judicial Campaign Conduct Committee, Inc. was formed by a mostly with a couple of liberal Republicans which set itself up as the judge and jury of ; for judges who are challenged by those seeking to unseat appointees of the Gc

The group monitored contests where sitting judges were challenged across the

The MDJCCC attempted to convince all those seeking judgeships to take a ple something which rather goes against the grain of Maryland political history.

Judges, sitting in their nearly lifetime appointments to cushy jobs which often im when to take lunch and how to put their bar bill down on the taxpayer's tab real for election. Thus the self-serving group who were formed in the 2012 election, public interest motivation, the truth might be that the group was formed solely to challengers and in the process, cut the public out of the process of determining

Complaints made to the AGC are investigated and usually dismissed, but once filed and prosecuted, can result in the disbarment of an attorney.

Complaints against Stanalonis, who did not sign the pledge formulated by the various attorneys and without any actual authority, resulted in him being found by the MDJCCC to have exaggerated and stretched the truth about his own resume and that of his opponent in that year's Judgeship race, according to statements listed on the group's website.

The truth of the matter is that it is highly likely that both candidates stretched the truth about their courtroom experience and backgrounds. After all, spinning the facts in an election is a proud American tradition.

Noted Baltimore newspaperman and author **H. L. Mencken** said one hundred years ago that "A judge is a law student who marks his own examination papers."

Voters don't really expect too much out of their elected officials and judges but the atmosphere of charges and counter charges dominated much of the election year in 2012.

Stanalonis was endorsed by the GOP Central Committee in the 2012 race and Densford, who had unsuccessfully sought election to the Maryland Senate in 1994 and was passed over for Judge on several occasions attracted Democratic Party supporters.

Sitting judges are rarely defeated when they have to stand for election. The last time a sitting judge was dumped by the voters was in 1972 when **Circuit Court Judge Joe Weiner** was defeated by Joseph A. Mattingly Sr.

An attempt by States Attorney Richard Fritz to defeat Judge Karen Abrams in 2004 was turned down by the voters who overwhelmingly retained Abrams as Judge. In the 2006 election, Judge Mike Stamm had been appointed to the bench by **Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich**. Stamm was c along with attorney Shane Mattingly, split the county vote and Stamm, a favorite election to be able to keep his robes and gavel, a job which will pay him for the

Sparling left his law practice to become the county attorney for St. Mary's Court has become the third Democrat with the last name of Mattingly to take on St. M Attorney Richard Fritz.

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and his office, reviewed the cases and dropped every single one of them. The investigation had been conducted by Fritz's fellow Republican Sheriff Tim Cameron, who posed for photos endorsing Fritz after his detectives had brought the massive criminal charges against Fritz's opponent in the election.

Following the election, five attorneys in the St. Mary's States Attorney's office quit their posts due to objections over the conduct of the office in the prosecution of John Mattingly and the embarrassment over the handling of the case.

The greatest irony in this case involving Stanalonis may be that his campaign charged that Densford (falsely) opposed registration of convicted sex predators.

In 1968, Stanalonis' s boss, Fritz, along with two other young men, pleaded guilty to carnal knowledge of a 15-year-old girl and got off without jail time due to a plea bargain. That criminal offense became a topic of the 1998 election and led to Fritz organizing and funding an effort conducted by him, Sheriff Richard Voorhaar and six deputies to clean out newsstands of all available copies of ST. MARY'S TODAY newspaper the night before the election in order to prevent voters from reading about the Fritz guilty plea or critical articles about Voorhaar. A lawsuit filed in Federal Court resulted in a landmark First Amendment ruling by the Fourth Circuit United States Court of Appeals ruling that the action of Fritz, Voorhaar and the deputies violated the civil rights of the publisher and the readers of the newspaper.

What Stanalonis didn't present to the public when it came to sex offenders, was that under current law, the possibility that his boss would be registered as a sex offender. In an interview with ABC 20/20, the victim in the case in which Fritz pleaded guilty, stated that she had been held down, was forcibly raped, that they all took turns and that she screamed for help. Fritz told Chris Wallace that the sex was consensual and when challenged at the idea that the young girl would have taken on the three young men, Fritz quipped, "it happens all the time."

In a prominent case of alleged rape that Stanalonis supervised — the prosecution of John Edison charged with rape — was found not guilty. The case became a focal point of the 2012 election when Stanalonis told reporters that he really didn't have anything to do with the case that it was assigned to other staff attorneys as he had to attend to a family emergency. In reality, the case blew up when it was revealed that two police officers involved lied about evidence in order to persuade a judge to grant a search warrant. In fact, the hospital examination of the victim showed that the young girls were not brutally raped, facts that the police withheld. The lead officer in the case works closely with Stanalonis and maintains a close personal relationship.

An attempt to reach Stanalonis for comment resulted in no ability to reach a human voice at the St. Mary's County States Attorney's Office after a convoluted series of recorded voice mails, message, listings, and redirects of the St. Mary's County government, circuit court, states attorney's office phone systems.

The phone system is intentionally set up this way, according to one attorney, to prevent the public from actually reaching anyone on the States Attorney's staff and favored attorneys are able to contact key states attorneys if they know the cell phone numbers of those they want to reach.

For the record, Stanalonis stated in several published accounts in 2012 that he denies the charges made to the MDJCCC.

In an candidates forum in 2012 according to an article in The Enterprise, Stanalonis said, "I think it's a ludicrous reason to file a complaint in an election." He later told the audience, "I believe the filing of the grievance was malicious and was an attack on my law license."

Stanalonis has not yet filed an answer to the charges made by the Attorney Grievance Commission but must do so within fifteen days of being served with the summons.

This comment has been provided by attorney George Meng:

Please note first that there is a vast difference between a complaint made to the Attorney Grievance Commission and a complaint made to the Maryland Judicial Campaign Conduct Committee. They are different complaints and do not go hand in hand.

In October 2012, it was reported that there was a claim by Mr. Stanalonis that his opponent or someone in his camp filed a grievance against him with the Maryland Attorney Grievance Commission. On October 12, 2012, Mr Wharton reported: "The question about the complaint filed against Stanalonis through the Maryland Attorney Grievance Commission was presented on one of the index cards gathered by members of the St. Mary's League of Women Voters from the forum's audience at Great Mills High School.

In August, Stanalonis' campaign activities were rebuked by the Maryland Judicial Campaign Conduct Committee. The committee criticized Stanalonis in part for comments in a flier about Densford's handling of criminals as a judge, his stance on circuit court judicial elections and his position on putting convicted sex offenders on a state registry. The committee report stated that Densford had not been on the bench long enough at that time to sentence any criminals, that the flier tried to mislead voters about his take on judicial elections and that his arguments on behalf of clients facing inclusion on the registry did not mean he was opposed to the registry's existence."

Someone from a newspaper called me at my office about this in that time frame. Since I received only one phone call, I presume it was Mr. Wharton. Mr. Wharton reported: "Meng said Thursday from his law office that he has not filed a complaint to the commission, on which he serves as one of its nine lawyers, and that only a complainant, the attorney targeted in the complaint and bar counsel should know about an initial filing." That was an accurate rendition of what I said to the caller.

That statement was true then and remains true now. I have never filed a complaint to the **Attorney Grievance Commission** about Mr. Stanlonis. My first knowledge about the AGC complaint came to me as a result of an email on March 19, 2014 from another lawyer who commented upon another case I was involved in and when I searched for his blog post, I found your article. Thereafter on March 20, 2014, I was informed at a bar meeting by a lawyer that a complaint had been filed and that lawyer had a copy which she agreed to send to me. It came to me today in an email. Thus, I was unable to comment upon your article until I saw the complaint.

In your article of March 15, 2014 in the Chesapeake Today, you wrote: "In another case of irony, attorney George Meng denied, according to The Enterprise published on Oct. 12, 2012, having made the complaint against Stanalonis, a fact now revealed to be quite the opposite, according to the charges placed against Stanalonis. Perhaps, Meng had simply either forgotten he had made the complaint or had not yet made one. Perhaps, the truth will come out on the entire affair as the case is heard in court."

Your reporting indicates that I was untruthful in my statements. Your reporting is inaccurate. A review of the Complaint filed in the Circuit Court for Prince George's County demonstrates clearly that the complainant was bar counsel not me. While I did file the complaint to **MDJCCC**, I did not file any complaint to the Attorney Grievance Commission. Commission members usually do not become aware of complaints until they reach a formal stage. My term on the AGC ended in June 2013 and the complaint against Mr. Stanalonis probably came to the attention of the Commission some time after that.

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