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Woman in Charge of New Jersey's Judicial Security Says She's the Target of Harassment

"Retaliating against and threatening the state's chief of court and judicial security must not be tolerated nor ignored, especially when it involves potentially high level state law enforcement and officials engaging in improper, retaliatory, unethical and illegal misconduct," Morante's lawyer wrote in his June 13 letter to the state's attorney general.

By Charles Toutant | July 11, 2022



The attorney for Robin Morante, the chief of court and judicial security for New Jersey's judiciary, claims that these signs were posted on poles near her home in Hopewell, New Jersey, as part of a campaign of harassment against her and that state officials are unwilling to investigate. Courtesy photo

The head of judicial security for New Jersey's court system claims she is the target of harassment by members of the state police, but state officials have allegedly ignored her calls for help.

Robin Morante, who runs the office that protects judges and investigates judicial threats, says she has been the target of food poisoning, character assassination and stalking on the job. She has retained an attorney who was written twice to Attorney General Matthew Platkin about the matter on May 31 and June 13, detailing her dealings with the state police and asking him to launch an investigation, but Platkin allegedly did not respond.

Morante's lawyer says the issues with state police are impairing the function of her office.

New Jersey has seen considerable discussion of the safety of federal judges since the July 2020 murder of U.S. District Judge Esther Salas' son and the wounding of her husband by a lawyer who appeared before her, but the safety of state judges has received less attention.

Steven Barnes, director of communications for Platkin, declined to comment when contacted by a reporter about Morante's allegations. The state judiciary and the state police also declined to comment on Morante's allegations.

Antagonism between Morante and the state police began in May 2021, when Morante and a colleague in her office were hospitalized after eating food contaminated with THC oil, a byproduct of marijuana, said Patrick Whalen. An investigation by the state police unit that provides security in the Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex found that a judiciary employee gave Morante and her colleague hash browns from Dunkin Donuts that were doused with THC oil. The person identified as responsible resigned, but was not charged with any crime, Whalen said.

Following the state police investigation, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office determined there wasn't enough evidence to support criminal charges, said a spokeswoman for Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo Onofri. But Morante believes the response to the incident was influenced by the state's legalization of recreational cannabis.

"Upon information and belief, this criminal incident was downplayed and ignored because it did not fit within the administration's 'legalize weed' platform," Whalen wrote in his June 13 letter to Platkin.

Although one person was identified as the perpetrator of the food poisoning, a state police report of the investigation did not make clear that another person was allegedly responsible for what happened, creating the false impression that Morante ingested the THC oil voluntarily, said Whalen. And two troopers who regularly interact with Morante's office obtained the report and allegedly disseminated it widely among the state police, creating the false impression that Morante suffered an overdose during recreational drug use, Whalen said.

"Because the report doesn't mention the actual perpetrator, the only logical explanation was this was our fault. So it's misleading, and it gets spread up to multiple people," Whalen said. Morante complained in an email to Col. Patrick Callahan, head of the state police, about the troopers' alleged conduct relating to the circulation of the report, but Callahan allegedly did not respond and did not refer the matter to the Office of Professional Standards, Whalen said.

But after Morante complained to Callahan, two state troopers whose duties entail interacting with the judicial security office, allegedly ceased all communications with her, Whalen said. And those troopers also made a complaint to the judiciary that Morante made disparaging remarks about a particular assignment judge, Whalen said. An inquiry found the allegations were unsubstantiated.

A few months later, in early November 2021, signs were posted on utility poles near Morante's home in Hopewell that said "Fire Robin Morante." Later, similar signs were hung on poles near the state police headquarters in Ewing, Whalen said. Whalen says the signs constitute a form of stalking, since they were hung where Morante's family would see them on their daily travels. The signs "were hung up to impugn my client's reputation" and "created undue anxiety and fear for [Morante's] family," Whalen said in his June 13 letter to Platkin. Whalen added that because the first group of signs appeared just after the conclusion of the inquiry about Morante's alleged disparagement of the judge, there is a "reasonable articulable suspicion" that members of the state police unit responsible for judicial security had some role in the posting of signs.

Whalen's June 13 letter to Platkin asked for his office to assume control over criminal and administrative investigations into the incidents of which she complained, including forensic examination of color printers and computers likely used to make the signs, and records from cellphone towers from the period the signs were likely hung.

Whalen wrote in his June 13 letter to Platkin, "Retaliating against and threatening the state's chief of court and judicial security must not be tolerated nor ignored, especially when it involves potentially high level state law enforcement and officials engaging in improper, retaliatory, unethical and illegal misconduct."

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