

COLLOQUY BETWEEN JUDGE LAWTON E. STEPHENS AND DEBORAH GONZALEZ
AT CONCLUSION OF COURT PROCEEDINGS ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2023

1 THE COURT: So all right. Appreciate y'all's --

2 MS. GONZALEZ: So, Your Honor, I'd just like to make
3 one announcement. I see that we don't have any cases left
4 for trial --

5 THE COURT: That's right.

6 MS. GONZALEZ: -- at this point --

7 THE COURT: Yeah.

8 MS. GONZALEZ: -- which is good because, Your Honor,
9 Mr. Hunter left your courtroom yesterday and resigned
10 which is the reason why I had to come even with --

11 THE COURT: Was it something I said?

12 MS. GONZALEZ: Yes, actually it was something that
13 you said and the way that you said it.

14 THE COURT: What did I say?

15 MS. GONZALEZ: And you were very rude to him
16 yesterday.

17 THE COURT: Come on up. Let's be on the record.

18 MS. GONZALEZ: And this has been --

19 THE COURT: Let's be on the record here.

20 MS. GONZALEZ: Yes.

21 THE COURT: Come up to the podium, please.

22 MS. GONZALEZ: Your Honor, if I can stay here because
23 this does not give me a lot of mobility.

24 THE COURT: I just want to make sure I can hear your
25 comments on the record.

1 MS. GONZALEZ: Okay. But yes, Your Honor. And this
2 has come up more than once in your courtroom and him being
3 very upset at the way that he's been treated. But it
4 takes me months to recruit these individuals. And it took
5 three weeks of him being in your courtroom and he
6 resigned.

7 THE COURT: Yeah.

8 MS. GONZALEZ: And this has put us in a really bad
9 situation.

10 THE COURT: Okay.

11 MS. GONZALEZ: As you see, I've had to come here with
12 a broken ankle against the advice of my doctor --

13 THE COURT: Yeah.

14 MS. GONZALEZ: -- to have somebody here in front of
15 you to take care of this calendar.

16 THE COURT: Okay.

17 MS. GONZALEZ: And I do just want it noted on the
18 record of why he resigned.

19 THE COURT: Okay.

20 MS. GONZALEZ: And it was because of what you said in
21 your courtroom.

22 THE COURT: So what did I say that was rude? I said
23 be on time; was that rude?

24 MS. GONZALEZ: No, Your Honor. It's also the way
25 that you say things.

1 THE COURT: I said subpoena witnesses that weren't
2 subpoenaed; was that rude?

3 MS. GONZALEZ: You know, there are ways that we can
4 talk to people. And even when you and I had that
5 conversation on the phone yesterday and you said well, I
6 hold him to, you know, certain expectations and I treat
7 people differently. Josh is new. You treated him great
8 today. You could've given that same grace to --

9 THE COURT: Right.

10 MS. GONZALEZ: -- Tab Hunter when he was here in your
11 courtroom.

12 THE COURT: Understand something. Understand that it
13 was represented to me by your office and by reviewing Mr.
14 Hunter's resume that he was a seasoned trial attorney and
15 that he was expected to know these things. Mr. Neal is a
16 law student. I didn't expect him to know these things.
17 But it was represented to me that Mr. Hunter had tried
18 many --

19 MS. GONZALEZ: And, Your Honor --

20 THE COURT: -- cases in court and I expected him to
21 be able to do it.

22 MS. GONZALEZ: And knowing --

23 THE COURT: That's why he was treated differently --

24 MS. GONZALEZ: -- knowing trial skills --

25 THE COURT: -- because the expectations of a seasoned

1 trial attorney are different than from a law student.

2 MS. GONZALEZ: And just like we spoke yesterday, Your
3 Honor, knowing trial skills and knowing these cases when
4 you're first brought into a brand new court where you have
5 to learn the facts and learn the people and learn the
6 parties and learn the judge and learn everybody else in
7 this courtroom. Okay?

8 THE COURT: Right.

9 MS. GONZALEZ: Not anybody can just walk in and just
10 do everything one hundred percent. And giving a little
11 grace can go a long way. But right now, Your Honor, I
12 don't have an ADA for your courtroom.

13 THE COURT: Right. Right. Well, I'll say this. I
14 do expect a lot from lawyers who come in and represent the
15 State. I expect a minimum amount of competence in the
16 law. I expect if I -- if I schedule a hearing on July the
17 5th for September the 18th and an attorney from the State
18 appears and says none of the witnesses have been
19 subpoenaed that I'm going to -- I think that I should hold
20 your office accountable.

21 MS. GONZALEZ: Yes.

22 THE COURT: Specifically hold you accountable, too --

23 MS. GONZALEZ: And hold me accountable.

24 THE COURT: -- because you're in charge.

25 MS. GONZALEZ: And you can call me in this courtroom.

1 THE COURT: Right.

2 MS. GONZALEZ: But the way that you treated him and
3 the way that you spoke to him was inappropriate. And I
4 even called you and said anytime that you have an issue,
5 you can call me and I will be here just like I had my
6 investigator pick me up today because I cannot walk, okay
7 --

8 THE COURT: Right.

9 MS. GONZALEZ: -- to be here for you. And all I'm
10 saying is that there are ways to talk to people and to
11 treat people. This is a very intense place to work in.
12 Okay? And what we --

13 THE COURT: Right. Yeah, especially because you're
14 so short-staffed.

15 MS. GONZALEZ: Yes, we are short-staffed.

16 THE COURT: Very short-staffed.

17 MS. GONZALEZ: And like I said, it takes a lot to
18 bring them in. But it certainly doesn't take nothing to
19 have them run away.

20 THE COURT: Right. Well --

21 MS. GONZALEZ: And it's not going to help us if we
22 keep losing them. Okay?

23 THE COURT: That's right.

24 MS. GONZALEZ: It doesn't help us. It doesn't help
25 anybody to get this stuff done.

1 THE COURT: Well, I -- I'm going to -- I mean, I
2 think when somebody is the district attorney, elected
3 district attorney, employed by the district attorney's
4 office as an assistant district attorney, I'm going to
5 hold them to a high degree of responsibility and
6 competence. And if I don't see it, I'm going to call it
7 out. And it's time after time after time after time I've
8 seen it with your assistant district attorneys that have
9 appeared in front of me not subpoenaing witnesses, not
10 subpoenaing witnesses for restitution hearings, not
11 knowing who their witnesses are for Jackson-Denno
12 hearings.

13 MS. GONZALEZ: And part of that has been the
14 turnover, Your Honor.

15 THE COURT: Right. The turnover --

16 MS. GONZALEZ: And part of that is I have come to ask
17 you --

18 THE COURT: And I can't -- it is your -- I think --

19 MS. GONZALEZ: I have asked you --

20 THE COURT: There's a lot of reasons why people are
21 quitting from your office and it's not because they're
22 being treated rudely in court. It's for a lot of other
23 reasons.

24 MS. GONZALEZ: Oh, I can give you some of those that
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THE COURT: I'm sure you can.

MS. GONZALEZ: Not everything has been --

THE COURT: But I'm telling you right now I'm going to hold them responsible.

MS. GONZALEZ: -- because of me, Your Honor. Okay?

THE COURT: I'm not going to hold their hands just because they just started because there's been so much turnover.

MS. GONZALEZ: And I'm not asking you to hold their hands. I am asking you to be professional and courtesy with them --

THE COURT: Okay.

MS. GONZALEZ: -- as they're trying to do this job and learn it the way that they need to.

THE COURT: Right.

MS. GONZALEZ: Okay?

THE COURT: Who are they learning it from?

MS. GONZALEZ: Well, that's part of the issue, Your Honor.

THE COURT: Who are they learning it from, Ms. Gonzalez, at long last?

MS. GONZALEZ: From PAC trainers when I am able to get them to training. Right?

THE COURT: Right.

MS. GONZALEZ: But the problem is if I am

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understaffed, I don't have coverage for them to go to training.

THE COURT: Right.

MS. GONZALEZ: This is something that I've brought to your attention, that I have brought to all the judges' attention --

THE COURT: Oh, yeah. Right.

MS. GONZALEZ: -- including one that when we were supposed to have summer conference, they decided to have a trial week.

THE COURT: Right. All right. So my suggestion to you -- and this is my final comment -- is that you look to yourself before you blame other people for all the issues that you're facing in the district attorney's office. And that's my final comment. Thank you.

MS. GONZALEZ: Well, thank you, Your Honor. And I have. But as somebody who has -- is trying to manage over 40 people --

THE COURT: Right.

MS. GONZALEZ: -- it's not really something that you can say when you're managing two or three.

THE COURT: Court is adjourned.

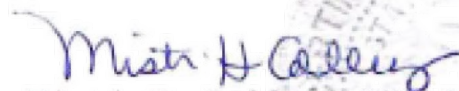
CERTIFICATE

STATE OF GEORGIA

COUNTY OF JACKSON

I, Misti H. Colley, Certified Court Reporter, -2516, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 2 through 9 constitute a true, complete and accurate transcript of Colloquy Between Judge Lawton E. Stephens and Deborah Gonzalez at Conclusion of Court Proceedings on September 21, 2023, taken down by me and transcribed under my supervision to the best of my ability.

In witness whereof, I hereby affix my hand on this the 21st day of September, 2023.


Misti H. Colley, CCR-2516

