

# NJ Judge Hit With Ethics Complaint for Alleged Staff Misuse, Hidden Recording

[Michael Booth](#), New Jersey Law Journal  
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A New Jersey judge is facing [ethics charges](#) for allegedly making a new law clerk work off-the-clock for no pay, secretly taping conversations with other judges and court officials and for having her secretary perform personal tasks, including her high school-age son's homework.

The state Supreme Court's Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct issued a three-count complaint against Superior Court Judge Deborah Gross-Quatrone on Tuesday accusing her of violating three canons of the Code of Judicial Conduct.

At the time of the alleged ethics violations, Gross-Quatrone was assigned to the Family Part in Bergen County. She is currently assigned to the Civil Division in Essex County, serving her initial seven-year term, after having been approved by the Senate in 2015.

According to the first count in the complaint, Gross-Quatrone had a new law clerk work, without compensation, for nearly three weeks before the clerk's assignment was actually supposed to start.

Appellate Division Judge Glenn Grant, the acting administrative director of the courts, had issued a memo in May 2015 that clerkships for the 2015-16 court year would begin on Aug. 24, 2015. The memo, the complaint said, specifically prohibited "in-chamber training days," even if the clerk agreed. The judiciary already had set aside time for clerks to be trained.

Gross-Quatrone hired the clerk, who was not identified, on Aug. 3, 2015. The next day, Windy Bernier, a human resources employee in Bergen, sent Gross-Quatrone's secretary, Maria DeLeon, a copy of Grant's memo, the complaint said.

The clerk, according to the complaint, worked for Gross-Quatrone from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Friday from Aug. 4 until Aug. 24, the date she actually was supposed to start, with the exception of three days of vacation. Gross-Quatrone required the clerk to work on a Sunday to make up vacation days, and work additional hours to make up for time spent at mandatory training sessions for Family Part clerks.

The clerk was not compensated for this work time until the judiciary became aware of the issue, the complaint said. The clerk was eventually transferred to another judge after a Dec. 11, 2015, meeting between Gross-Quatrone and Lynda Villareal, a human resources manager for the vicinage, and Laura Simoldoni, the vicinage's trial court administrator, revealed the extra work the judge had required.

Days later, Gross-Quatrone met with Bergen County Assignment Judge Bonnie Mizdol to discuss the issue. Gross-Quatrone, who denied ever receiving Grant's memo, secretly taped the meeting, the complaint said.

Another meeting was held a week later between Gross-Quatrone, Mizdol, Family Part Presiding Judge Peter Melchionne, Simoldoni and Diana Moskal, the Family Division manager, to discuss how to handle motions and orders without having a clerk.

Gross-Quatrone, according to the complaint, wanted DeLeon to attend, but Mizdol denied the request. Gross-Quatrone then asked to have the meeting moved to a courtroom so that it could be recorded, but that request also was rebuffed by Mizdol, and the meeting eventually proceeded.

During the meeting, the complaint said, Simoldoni saw a red flashing light in Gross-Quatrone's purse, which turned out to be part of a digital recorder, though Gross-Quatrone denied recording the meeting.

The recorder was confiscated after it became evident Gross-Quatrone was recording the meeting, but was returned after a copy of the recording was made, according to the complaint.

"By her conduct in repeatedly and surreptitiously recording her meetings with her assignment judge, [Gross-Quatrone] demonstrated a disrespect for the judiciary and an inability to conform her conduct to the high standards of conduct expected of judges," the complaint said.

The last count alleges that Gross-Quatrone had DeLeon perform personal work for her and help with her son's homework.

Gross-Quatrone allegedly had DeLeon check jewelry orders, rental car reservations, vacation itineraries, and inquire about Louis Vuitton bags and store credit cards, as well as send out bills to clients from Gross-Quatrone's former practice.

On Sept. 9, 2015, the judge allegedly had DeLeon do a homework assignment for her teenage son and order a book for him.

"How is [the] assignment going?" Gross-Quatrone asked at one point, according to the complaint. "I am working on [the] assignment," DeLeon replied. "I got the book online. I will have a draft done by tomorrow [a.m.] for him to look at."

"By directing DeLeon to perform extrajudicial activities in the form of personal work ... during work hours and using judiciary equipment, [Gross-Quatrone] repeatedly misused judiciary resources," the complaint said.

The complaint alleges that Gross-Quatrone violated Canon 1, Rule 1.1, which requires that judges observe high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of the judiciary is preserved; Canon 2, Rule 2.1, which requires judges to promote public confidence in the independence, integrity and impartiality of the judiciary; and Canon 5, Rule 5.1(B)(3), which bars judges from using court premises, staff, stationery, equipment or other resources for extrajudicial activities.

ACJC Counsel Maureen Bauman did not specify what level of discipline would be sought for Gross-Quatrone if the allegations are proved.

Before her nomination to the bench by Gov. Chris Christie, Gross-Quatrone was a solo in Saddle Brook, where she also was a municipal court judge. She was admitted to the bar in 1990. In her private practice, Gross-Quatrone focused on family law and real estate matters. She is a former president of the Bergen County Bar Association and a graduate of Pace University School of Law and Montclair State.

Gross-Quatrone did not return a telephone call seeking comment, and it was not clear whether she had retained an attorney.

Contact the reporter at [mbooth@alm.com](mailto:mbooth@alm.com).

## What's being said

- The Commodore

Mar 09, 2017

This is clearly a course of conduct for Gross-Quatrone. She has no business holding public employment in any capacity, let alone as a judge. NJ has a surplus of grossly incompetent and intellectually lazy judges as it is. Gross-Quatrone is not helping the reputation. NOTE for anyone that is free to disagree: I have 17 years of practice (NJ&NY) and a clerkship under my belt; my opinion is not born of any personal grudge or a legal defeat...I've just seen the NJ judicial malaise and mediocrity over and over and over, often to my benefit.

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- David Perry Davis, Esq

Mar 08, 2017

Wait - on the other hand... if clerkships started Aug 24 (instead of 31), maybe there ARE training days built in where the old clerk can really work with the new one? Or...can the old clerk (while collecting unemployment and looking for a new job) stay a few days after September 1? Any way it's done, there most definitely should be a few days of overlap.

- David Perry Davis, Esq

Mar 08, 2017

I wonder if it's all political or legit. 20 years ago, I clerked in Family. The old clerk would always let the new one come in and learn on the job - it's utterly absurd to think that the Law Clerk Boot Camp they now run can prepare someone the same way that sitting down with the old clerk does. Why would the AOC possibly issue a memo &#34;specifically prohibit in-chamber training days,&#34; even if the clerk agreed? If the judge told the incoming clerk she/he HAD TO come in, I agree that would be inappropriate, but to prohibit it... end result is just a steeper learning curve, resulting in litigants not getting the best decisions possible.

- Patty29

Mar 08, 2017

Her private practice office was a mess too. She prepared draft Wills for some family members and mailed them to be reviewed.... except they were printed on used paper --the reverse sides of which contained another client's divorce/property settlement agreement!! ..nothing like divulging personal info!

- Another Victim Abused

Mar 08, 2017

This is no surprise here. There are so many questions that should be asked, so many violations. And they will continue to close their eyes. And let the judges, lawyers miss use the law. New Jersey - Bergen the worst!

- dadzrites1

Mar 08, 2017

What a bunch of garbage. They go after a judge for having her staff do personal work, but when it comes to disciplining and removing judges like Morris County Family Court Judge Philip Maenza for violating the constitutional rights of not one, not two, but over a dozen litigants, the Senate Judiciary Committee puts him back on the bench for another 7-year term to violate rights. And, he's back to violating rights, as several litigants have complained about his draconian orders not based on reality. Those are REAL violations of the JCC Canons 1, 2 and 3. Instead of worrying about whether a judge is taping a discipline hearing, the AOC should be removing judges for constitutional rights violations.

- NJ Mike

Mar 08, 2017

A real class act. Makes sense seeing as Christie appointed her!