



Judicial Conduct Board acknowledges it ignored complaints

A state agency under scrutiny for failing to act on misconduct complaints against two former Luzerne County judges never investigated an earlier complaint and adjusted its handling of the most detailed allegations because it was already prosecuting ex-county Judge Ann H. Lokuta, agency officials said.

The state Judicial Conduct Board has received four complaints against former judges Michael T. Conahan and Mark A. Ciavarella Jr. between July 2004 and July 2008 but never took action because the allegations were either outside the scope of a state judicial code or conflicted with other investigations, the officials said.

In written answers to questions from a state panel investigating Conahan, Ciavarella and the county kids-for-cash scandal, conduct board chief counsel Joseph A. Massa Jr. and attorney Paul H. Titus said the board was initially advised to investigate a 2006 complaint against the judges, but was later told to hold off while they focused instead on allegations against Lokuta.



Massa

The anonymous 2006 complaint accusing Conahan and Ciavarella of consorting with a mafia boss and fixing cases for allies.

Titus said Massa made a written recommendation in May 2007 advising the board to authorize a full investigation into the complaint. Massa later made an oral recommendation to table the matter until an October 2007 meeting because of the pending Lokuta prosecution.

The timing of the 2006 complaint led board members and staff to suspect it had been authored by former Lokuta, who was facing her own allegations of misconduct, deputy chief counsel Francis J. Puskas, told the state panel, the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice, last month.

Lokuta has acknowledged that a member of her judicial staff had filed the complaint.

Federal prosecutors charged Ciavarella, 60, and Conahan, 57, in January 2009 with pocketing \$2.8 million in kickbacks from backers of a pair of for-profit juvenile detention centers. Ciavarella, the juvenile court judge from 2003 to May 2008, has admitted to violating the rights of thousands of young defendants.

Lokuta, who was removed from the bench in December 2008, was accused of acting discourteous to her staff, creating a tense atmosphere in her chambers, badgering witnesses and attorneys and arriving late to court.

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From 2004 to 2008 the JCB never took any action? That's about as long as our entire involvement in World War II!

Report

LoneRager, 18 March 2010 kl. 19:45

From 2008 to 2008 the JCB never took any action? That's about as long as our entire involvement in World War II!

Report

LoneRager, 18 March 2010 kl. 16:41

Think about who appoints the conduct board members then think who bought the detention center.

Report

Western Pa, 13 March 2010 kl. 10:32

No way, you are not going to get off that easy. The JCB did not investigate the two dirtbag judges from Luzerne County because of lack of funds. It did not investigate the judges because their palms were greased by Conahan to investigate Lokuta and leave the two dirtbags alone.

Report

J.W., 10 March 2010 kl. 19:29

Why has this newspaper framed the information available so softly on the JCB's response to the Juvenile Commission? Other investigative sources are not so censored. The JCB should be investigated by a grand jury. This good ole boys network may be bad enough to consider their actions "aiding & abetting". So they either covered for Conahan for money or Conahan had something on one or more of them. CORRUPTION RULES; Conahan was right; he could get away with just about anything.

Report

Can "Corruption Rules" ever be stopped, 10 March 2010 kl. 19:16

With the Scranton Fed Courthouse having a reputation for "closeness" to both Luzerne & Lackawanna Commonpleas Courts, I wouldn't be surprised if these 2 crook judges never see a prison. In fact, I'd be surprised if they ever do _ misuse of "IMMUNITY" already granted. If there is a Fed judge such as Kosik who may do the act lawfully & morally, they get rid of him. Is the FIX IN? I'm convinced it is. No genius needed to figure that out. So far, if it looks like a duck; quacks like a duck; it is a duck.

Report

Exposure doesn't even seem to effect these scummy crooks, 10 March 2010 kl. 18:36

I agree with what a joke. I have also sent complaints, on letterhead, and gotten no response. It appears no complaint sees the light of day if you were friends with certain people. Orié is right, do away with this board!

Report

Western PA, 10 March 2010 kl. 15:46

Can anyone believe anything these days. It seems far more importance was placed on going after Lokuta for being discourteous to her staff and late for court than actual case fixing and sending kids to jail for cash. Are these people for real? Just like they pick a guy up and jail him for stealing cents off newspaper coupons while real thieves and drug dealers get released on their own recognizance. We live in one messed up place.

Report

What?, 10 March 2010 kl. 14:17

Yes, I can see where Lokuta being discourteous to her staff and creating a tense atmosphere would trump complaints of Conahan and Ciavarella case fixing, violating the rights of children and having dealings with suspected mob figures. Are they for real?

I'm sure that their JCB chair, Pat Judge, who had multiple business partnerships with Conahan at that time had nothing to do with the decision to table the investigation either. Well, I guess it doesn't matter whether we buy what they say, as long as they get away with it.

Report

Cut me a break!, 10 March 2010 kl. 11:28

Thank you for being honest Mr. Massa.

Report

Jack, 10 March 2010 kl. 09:31

What BS. The who system is corrupt.

Report

mikeg, 10 March 2010 kl. 08:45

There is a huge difference between ignoring something and making a conscious effort to not pursue. They had four complaints that they did not pursue. The Penna. Judicial Conduct Board appears to be an extension of the corruption that exists in Luzerne County. The Chairman of the board at the time was a business partner with former Judge Conahan who was the subject of the complaints in question. The way the board went after Judge Lokuta and ignored Conahan makes for a Grand Jury investigation. Don't wait for the FBI on this one. The JCB was not funded with any Federal money.

Report

Larry, 10 March 2010 kl. 08:30

Fire them all and put people in the position that takes complaints seriously. I personally have sent them a complaint about a judge and lawyers but never heard anything. I believe they will not do anything until the FBI or some other government agency gets involved.

Report

What a joke, 10 March 2010 kl. 08:24

