



# DONALD TRUMP IS DEMANDING A NEW JUDGE JUST DAYS BEFORE THE START OF HIS HUSH-MONEY CRIMINAL TRIAL - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Former President Donald Trump is demanding a new judge just days before his hush-money criminal trial is set to begin, rehashing longstanding grievances with the current judge in a long-shot, eleventh-hour bid to disrupt and delay the case.

Trump's lawyers — echoing his recent social media complaints — urged Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan to step aside from the case, alleging bias and a conflict of interest because his daughter is a Democratic political consultant. The judge rejected a similar request last August.

In court papers made public Friday, Trump's lawyers said it is improper for Merchan "to preside over these proceedings while Ms. Merchan benefits, financially and reputationally, from the manner in which this case is interfering" with Trump's campaign as the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

The trial is scheduled to begin April 15. It is the first of Trump's four criminal cases scheduled to go to trial and would be the first-ever criminal trial of a former president.

Merchan didn't immediately rule. The decision is entirely up to him. If he were to exit, it would throw the trial schedule into disarray, giving Trump a long-sought postponement while a new judge gets up to speed.

Messages seeking comment were left for a court spokesperson and for Merchan's daughter, Loren Merchan. The Manhattan district attorney's office said it sees no reason for Merchan to step aside.

The defense's claims that Loren Merchan is profiting from her father's decisions require "multiple attenuated factual leaps here that undercut any direct connection" between her firm and this case, prosecutor Matthew Colangelo wrote in a letter to the judge.

"This daisy chain of innuendos is a far cry from evidence" that Judge Merchan has a direct, personal or financial interest in reaching a particular conclusion, Colangelo wrote.

Loren Merchan is president of Authentic Campaigns, which has collected at least \$70 million in payments from Democratic candidates and causes since she helped found the company in 2018, records show.

The firm's past clients include President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and Senate Majority PAC, a big-spending political committee affiliated with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. Senate Majority PAC has paid Authentic Campaigns \$15.2 million, according to campaign finance disclosures.

In a separate development Friday, Merchan blocked Trump's lawyers from forcing NBC to provide them with materials related to its recent documentary about porn actor Stormy Daniels, a key prosecution witness. He ruled that the defense's subpoena was "the very definition of a fishing expedition" and didn't meet a legal burden for requiring a news organization to provide access to its notes and documents.

On Wednesday, Merchan rejected the presumptive Republican nominee's request to delay the trial until the Supreme Court rules on presidential immunity claims he raised in another of his criminal cases. The judge has yet to rule on another defense delay request — this one alleging he won't get a fair trial because of "prejudicial media coverage."

The hush money case centers on allegations that Trump falsified his company's records to hide the nature of payments to his former lawyer Michael Cohen, who helped Trump bury negative stories during his 2016 campaign. Among other things, Cohen paid Daniels \$130,000 to suppress her claims of an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump years earlier.

Trump pleaded not guilty last year to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. He has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels. His lawyers argue the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Trump foreshadowed his lawyers' renewed push to have Merchan exit the case with posts assailing the judge and his daughter last week on his Truth Social platform.

Trump suggested, without evidence, that Merchan's rulings — including his decision to impose a gag order on Trump — were swayed by his daughter's consulting interests. He wrongly claimed that she had posted a social media photo showing him behind bars. Trump's attacks on Lauren Merchan led the judge to expand the gag order to prohibit him from making public statements about his family.

"The Judge has to recuse himself immediately, and right the wrong committed by not doing so last year," Trump wrote on March 27. "If the Biased and Conflicted Judge is allowed to stay on this Sham 'Case,' it will be another sad example of our Country becoming a Banana Republic, not the America we used to know and love."


Trump similarly pressed the judge in his Washington, D.C., election interference case to recuse herself, claiming her past comments about him called into question her ability to be fair. But U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan said there was no reason for her to step aside.

Merchan's daughter featured prominently in the defense's calls for his recusal last year. They also seized on several small donations the judge made totaling to Democratic causes during the 2020 campaign. They totaled \$35, including \$15 to Biden.

Merchan rejected that request, writing last August that a state court ethics panel had found that Loren Merchan's work had no bearing on his impartiality. The judge said he was certain of his "ability to be fair and impartial" and said Trump's lawyers had "failed to demonstrate that there exists concrete, or even realistic reasons for recusal to be appropriate, much less required on these grounds."

Trump's lawyers contend circumstances have now changed, with Trump locked in a rematch against President Joe Biden, and Democrats — including clients of Loren Merchan's firm — seeking to capitalize on Trump's legal troubles with fundraising emails framed around developments in the hush-money case.

"It would be completely unacceptable to most New Yorkers if the judge presiding over these proceedings had an adult child who worked

at WinRed or MAGA Inc.," Blanche and Necheles wrote, referring to  a Republican fundraising platform and a pro-Trump fundraising committee.

In seeking Merchan's recusal, Trump's lawyers also took issue with his decision to give an interview to The Associated Press last month, suggesting he may have violated judicial conduct rules, and they questioned his use of a court spokesperson last week to deny Trump's claims that she had posted the image of Trump in jail.

In the interview, Merchan told the AP that he and his staff were working diligently to prepare for the historic first trial of a former president, saying: "There's no agenda here. We want to follow the law. We want justice to be done."

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Associated Press reporters Brian Slodysko and Alanna Durkin Richer in Washington and Jennifer Peltz in New York contributed to this report.

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