

Lina Lorenzi--PRESENTATION TO JUDICIARY COMMITTEE 3/16/07

Good afternoon. My name is Lina Lorenzi. I am here to support Bill No. 6905 AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE JUDICIAL BRANCH.

I am Puerto Rican. I was born and raised in East Harlem. I live in Killingworth. I am a graduate of Fordham University and NYU Law School and am admitted to practice law in the State of Connecticut.

On August 11, 2006, I was terminated from my position as Program Manager in Jury Administration by the Jury Administrator of the Judicial Branch. At the time, I was the highest ranking and only Latina in a management position in Court Operations. My termination came after almost ten years of service. During the final year and a half of my employment, I was the victim of constant bullying, demeaning and unprofessional speech, and conduct by the Jury Administrator.

Her misconduct began when she learned I might be a candidate for a promotion which would make me her boss. When I complained to her superiors about her prejudicial treatment, she retaliated by sending misinformation about my work to superiors, concocting unsatisfactory work evaluations, and repeatedly extending my probationary period. My performance appraisals ignored the accomplishments of the Jury Outreach Program that I managed, but instead were filled with digressions about violations of unwritten rules such as eating a fish sandwich at my desk.

My complaints to Court Operations managers were met with statements like, "you have to know your place", "this meeting never happened", "don't give me that Latino shit", and "it's not how good your work is but how you get along with your supervisor". With the full knowledge and consent of top management, I was subjected to such a hostile work environment that I was forced to take a medical leave for treatment of nervous exhaustion and collapse in February 2006.

While on leave, I filed a complaint against the Judicial Branch and the Jury Administrator with the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. My complaint has passed a Merit Review Assessment and is scheduled for a fact-finding hearing next month. Before going to the CHRO, I could have filed a complaint with the Judicial Branch's Affirmative Action Officer. Previous experience, however, had shown me that this would be futile, and a waste of time.

I have witnessed discriminatory behavior towards others as well. Prior to being promoted to Program Manager in Jury Administration in November 2004, I was the Deputy Chief Clerk for Hartford Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. In June 2004, I reported to my supervisor and the Judicial Branch's Affirmative Action Officer that several court personnel had come to my office to report racially inappropriate remarks being made by a Marshal in our court.

The same Marshal had made racial remarks in my office. Among the things he said to me were "The people who come into this court are cockroaches.", "There is too much Spanish spoken in this building. What are you going to do about it before I have to take it higher?"

The Affirmative Action Officer informed me that an investigation would take place. Much to my horror, the investigation cleared the Marshal who was subsequently promoted and transferred to another court.

Before this incident, I had tremendous support from my supervisor for my work in the juvenile court. The situation soon changed. I was given huge amounts of new paperwork in addition to running the largest juvenile court in the state. Three months after I submitted the complaint against the Marshall I was written up for failing to keep up with this new work. This happened despite repeated requests for relief. My experience is that complaints to Affirmative Action Officer in the Judicial Branch not only result in no action on the complaint, but retaliation against the whistleblower.

Much has been made lately about concerns regarding secrecy and politics within the judiciary in this state. Another major component of the judicial system is the administrative sections of the Judicial Branch with their many administrators and managers. Many of the 4,000 rank and file employees of the Branch are members of minority groups. Complaints of racial discrimination are kept within the confines of the

Branch. With the passage of Bill No. 6905, the very existence of these complaints will no longer be hidden from public view.

Before I conclude I'd like to also say that there are hundreds and hundreds of honorable people working within the Judicial Branch many of whom, I'm sure, have witnessed and experienced similar incidents but are afraid to speak up. Passage of Bill No. 6905 will help all of them because the sunlight, transparency and accountability that would ensue from the passage of this bill will make it much more difficult to sweep things under the rug.

I wouldn't want anyone else to go through the ordeal I had to endure.