

Patterson 'punishes' news leak

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson denied Friday that he or any member of his staff sought the dismissal of the person believed responsible for telling the press about outside business activities of the head of the prosecutor's consumer protection division.

However, Patterson admitted the decision to drastically reduce the working hours of Marilyn Appel, the consumer fraud investigator suspected of the news leak, was prompted by a series of news articles last week.

Patterson said Mrs. Appel has asked to have her hours reduced for some time. Last week, in the aftermath of the news stories, that request was granted.

ALTHOUGH MRS. Appel said Friday she was pleased with her new schedule, she preferred not to discuss the matter further and indicated talking about it would be difficult. Her office is within hearing range of her boss, Sheri Perelli.

The news stories revealed that Miss Perelli is involved in a three-person public relations outfit that grossed between \$380 and \$400 last year.

The stories implied that Miss Perelli's outside activity represented at least a potential conflict of interest should any of her outside clients ever be involved in an investigation by the consumer unit.

Miss Perelli's group, registered as Perelli Pomeroy and Associates, has done work for a shopping center, a tennis club and a furrier, according to the reports. Miss Perelli's sister, Mrs.

Carol Hill, a commercial artist, and Jeanne Pomeroy, a friend, are partners in the group.

MRS. APPEL was quoted in news articles as saying Patterson demanded her resignation Wednesday morning because he believed she talked to the press.

Both Patterson and Miss Perelli, besides denying they had anything to do with reprimanding Mrs. Appel, criticized the news reports for exaggerating and distorting the situation.

Miss Perelli insisted she hasn't done anything that represents a conflict of interest and Patterson, who has been aware of Miss Perelli's activities for several months, supported that claim.

When the matter came to Patterson's attention three months ago, he said he asked Richard Thompson, the chief assistant prosecutor, to investigate. Patterson said he was satisfied then, as now, that a conflict didn't exist.

PATTERSON, WHO has a firm rule that none of his prosecutors may do any outside legal activity, said he was confident that Miss Perelli would remove herself from any consumer investigation if the potential for conflict of interest existed.

Miss Perelli, who downplayed the extent of her outside activity, said she doesn't plan to give up her after hours work—and Patterson said he had no intention of asking her to.

Miss Perelli described her outside activity as primarily "a creative outlet." Combining her own writing skills and her partners' talents, Miss Perelli said her group has prepared artwork and written materials for a few clients but has never "represented"

these clients in the way a public relations firm does.

She added she has worked too hard to make the consumer unit effective to jeopardize it by doing something that would compromise its integrity.

"There is no conflict of interest on my part," she said, "and there never will be."

SOME COUNTY sources, however, were concerned about Miss Perelli's conduct. There was discussion that both she and Patterson would be asked to explain the situation to the Personnel Practices Committee of the board of commissioners.

Miss Perelli said she offered to do just that shortly after the news stories broke.

There are currently no county regulations banning county employees from after-hours activities that might represent a conflict of interest. A measure to establish a county code of ethics failed last year.



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