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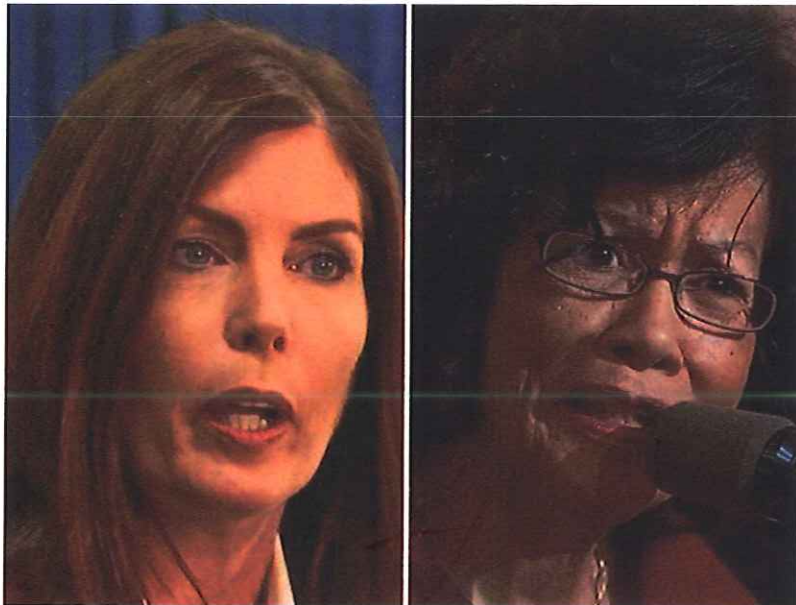
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Accused in sting case cites race bias

Seeking dismissal of charges, State Rep. Louise Williams Bishop is pointing to Kane's own criticism of the investigation.

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State Rep. Louise Williams Bishop (right) allegedly received \$1,500, but seeks dismissal of the charges by citing Kathleen Kane's (left) criticism of the probe.



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The Inquirer

It was probably inevitable.

The defense lawyer for State Rep. Louise Williams Bishop, a Philadelphia legislator arrested in the sting corruption case, is seeking to have the charges against her dismissed, saying she was targeted for prosecution because she is African American.

To make his case, the lawyer cites Attorney General Kathleen G. Kane's repeated statements that the case may have been tainted by racial prejudice.

"The elected attorney general of this Commonwealth declined to prosecute this matter," lawyer A. Charles Peruto Jr. wrote in a legal brief filed this month.

Peruto noted that Kane, in defending her decision to not pursue the sting, said the lead investigator in the case had

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said he had been directed to target blacks.

"All of the targeted elected officials [charged in the case] are African-American," Peruto wrote.

Kane spokesman Church Ardo said last week that the attorney general would prefer not to figure in the defense strategy but that her views on the sting had not changed.

"She stands by her opinion about the merits of the case - or lack of merits, as the case may be," Ardo said.

Bishop is among five current or former Democratic state representatives from Philadelphia awaiting trial in the sting case. A sixth defendant, a former Traffic Court judge, pleaded guilty in December.

All six are black.

Prosecutors say the sting's undercover operative gave Bishop a total of \$1,500 during three meetings in 2010 and 2011. They said the informant taped Bishop replying, "That's a great help. That's a biggie," as she pocketed the last payment.

Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams adopted the sting after The Inquirer disclosed last year that Kane had secretly shut it down in 2013.

Williams, a Democrat like Kane, has denounced Kane's decision and called her references to a racial motivation baseless, even "disgusting." He noted that undercover operative Tyron Ali had paid the money in political circles with which he was familiar.

"When you prosecute a member of the 52d Street Gang, you get people who are going to look like people from 52d Street," Williams said last year. "When you prosecute people in Lower Merion, they are going to be people who look like they come from Lower Merion."

Before Kane ended the probe, prosecutors in the Attorney General's Office who launched the sting recommended in planning documents that, as a next step, Ali be set up as chief of a phony lobbying business in Harrisburg. They say this ruse would likely have ultimately netted a larger, more diverse group of defendants.

'Frivolous'

Assistant District Attorney Mark Gilson, who with colleague Brad Bender has headed a resurrection of the sting case by Philadelphia prosecutors, called Bishop's legal position "frivolous."

"We've been looking at this for almost a year and we have yet to find any evidence of racial targeting by anybody who was involved in this investigation," Gilson said.

Of Kane, he said: "People in her office told us she was repeatedly told not to use that as a reason for not bringing charges. As we have seen time and time again, she ignored the advice of the people who she pays to advise her."

In his legal motions, Peruto noted that Kane has said that



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Claude Thomas, a former agent in the Attorney General's Office, had told her investigators he was instructed to target black politicians.

Thomas has denied that race played any role in the sting, and, last month, he filed a defamation suit against Kane for publicly suggesting that.

Peruto also argued in legal motions that the charges against Bishop should be dismissed because they were filed too late. He noted that prosecutors allege Bishop, 81, pocketed cash from Ali in 2010 and 2011.

Since then, Bishop's health, and especially her memory, has "rapidly declined," hampering her ability to defend herself, Peruto said.

Memory loss

Bishop is the second-oldest-serving member of the legislature. She was unopposed last year for reelection to her West Philadelphia district in both the primary and general elections, and began her 14th two-year term in January.

Peruto also requested that if the case goes forward, the trial take place in Philadelphia, Bishop's home turf, rather than in Dauphin County, as scheduled. Harrisburg, the state capitol, is the county seat in Dauphin County.

Gilson said he was confounded by the argument that Bishop had debilitating memory loss.

"She's a duly elected state representative who is currently sitting and deciding matters [affecting] the entire commonwealth. The woman is voting on laws," Gilson said.

"She's not competent enough to go to trial, but she's competent to be a state representative?" Gilson asked. "Is there a lower level of competence to be a state representative than to be a defendant in a criminal case?"

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