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Former state Rep. J.P. Miranda sentenced to 5 years probation



Miranda: Illegally funneled money to sis.



GALLERY: Miranda: Illegally funneled money to sis.

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FORMER STATE Rep. Jose P. "J.P." Miranda was sentenced yesterday in Philadelphia Common Pleas Court to five years' probation in a case in which he illegally funneled money to his sister, then lied about it before a grand jury.

Miranda's sister, Michelle Wilson, was sentenced to two years' probation for lying before the grand jury.

Wilson was barred from working for her brother because of state ethics rules on nepotism. But, Miranda, then a freshman state representative in 2013, wanted to hire his older, more-educated sister, who has a master's degree, because "the quality of the staff I had wasn't equipped" to carry out the work he envisioned doing, Miranda, 29, told Judge Edward Wright yesterday.

"I felt she was essential," Miranda said. "But I went about it the wrong way, so I'm very, very sorry."

Miranda hired a man, Timothy Duckett, as a "ghost employee" and through him, funneled money to pay Wilson from January to March 2013. She received about \$1,700.

Miranda's lawyer, A. Charles Peruto Jr., told the judge that when Miranda won his House seat in November 2012 - as a Democrat to represent the 197th District, which includes parts of North Philadelphia - he "wasn't getting any help" from ward leaders because he bucked the party.

"He had the best intentions in the world" for his district, Peruto said, noting that Miranda was young and brought on his sister to help in the office. "She was the best worker for him in the world."

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Miranda and his sister were charged by a Philadelphia grand jury in January 2014 with three felony counts: restricted activities/conflict of interest, perjury and conspiracy.

This past January, he and his sister each pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor false-swearing charge in relation to having lied to the grand jury. Miranda also pleaded guilty to the restricted-activities felony charge.

In exchange for their pleas, prosecutors dropped remaining charges, including felony perjury.

Wilson, 35, yesterday apologized to the judge and said, "I thought I had given the proper answers" to the grand jury.

Her lawyer, Robert Mozenter, said this case was about a sister "helping her brother out."

"She's sitting here because she was naive as to what the political situation was," Mozenter said.

Both Peruto and Mozenter told the judge their clients had gotten prior bad legal advice about testifying before a grand jury.

Assistant District Attorney Frank Fina said "it's an extraordinarily serious matter - whether it's on behalf of a family member or otherwise - to lie before a grand jury."

He agreed with Peruto that Miranda was looked upon highly by his constituents. "Everyone I talked to," he said, spoke of "the hope and the promise of Mr. Miranda." But in the end, Miranda dashed his constituents' hopes by serving his own self-interest, Fina said.

As for Wilson, Fina agreed she is remorseful.

The judge encouraged both defendants, who are unemployed, to seek work again, saying they are smart and have a lot to offer.

Miranda last May lost his bid for re-election in the primary.

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