



Probation for ex-lawmaker, sister in 'ghost employee' scheme

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State Rep. J.P. Miranda admitted hiring his sister against House Democrats' rules and then trying to conceal the hire.

Joseph A. Slobodzian, Inquirer Staff Writer

LAST UPDATED: Friday, April 3, 2015, 1:08 AM

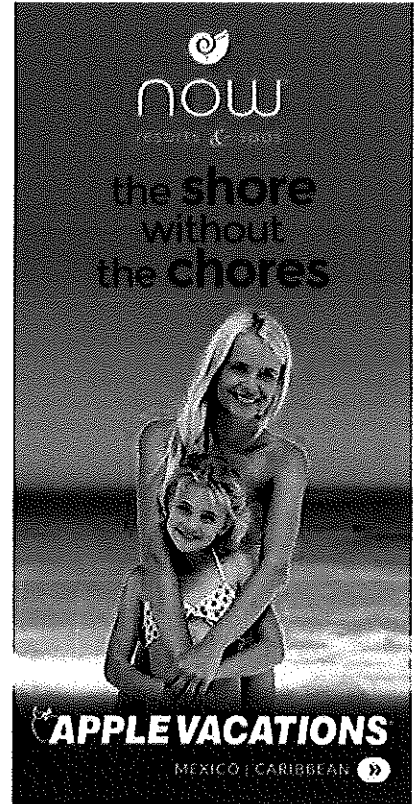
POSTED: Thursday, April 2, 2015, 11:52 AM

A former one-term Philadelphia state legislator and his sister were each sentenced to probation Thursday on their guilty pleas in a "ghost employee" scheme that paid her \$1,700.

Jose "J.P." Miranda and Michelle Wilson apologized during separate sentencing hearings before Common Pleas Court Judge Edward C. Wright.

Miranda, 29, was sentenced to five years' probation on his guilty plea to a felony count of conflict of interest and a misdemeanor charge of lying to a county grand jury. Wright sentenced Wilson, 35, to two years' probation on her guilty plea to a misdemeanor count of lying to the grand jury.

State sentencing guidelines recommended a jail sentence of up to nine months for Miranda and probation for his sister. Assistant District Attorney Frank Fina did not make a sentencing recommendation to the judge.



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The Inquirer

Both Miranda's attorney, A. Charles Peruto Jr., and Wilson's, Robert B. Mozenter, described their clients as naive outsiders to politics who got little assistance - or good advice - once Miranda got to Harrisburg in 2013.

Miranda won the Democratic nomination in the 197th District - parts of North Philadelphia west of Broad Street through East Falls - in 2012 by upsetting the organization-backed candidate, Jewel Williams, daughter of Philadelphia Sheriff Jewel Williams, who held the seat for 10 years before being elected sheriff.

Though Miranda had worked in City Council, in the state Senate, and for Mayor Nutter, Peruto said the newly elected representative found himself frozen out in Harrisburg.

Peruto said Miranda struggled to find qualified staff to help establish a legislative office and turned to his sister, who has a master's degree, to volunteer. She was barred from working because of new legislative nepotism rules.

When the volunteering became a full-time job, Miranda decided to financially help Wilson. Miranda hired Timothy Duckett as a legislative assistant but told him not to work a 40-hour week and to give part of his \$36,000 annual salary to Wilson.

Duckett later testified under a grant of immunity that he kicked back \$1,700 to Wilson before refusing to continue the practice.

At sentencing, Wright seemed sympathetic to Wilson, noting that she had overcome a traumatic childhood and had an emotional relapse as a result of this criminal investigation. The judge cited a character letter submitted on her behalf by her former boss, City Councilman Curtis Jones Jr.

"I truly believe your brother had the power to stop this," Wright told Wilson. "I expect you to hold your head up, pick yourself up by your bootstraps, and make your way again in life."

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