



Lawyer is suing former judge

Berwick attorney in flap over tie objects to online post

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BLOOMSBURG — The Berwick attorney thrown out of court last month for not wearing a tie is suing a former judge for posting his opinion about it on social media.

In a lawsuit filed Tuesday, Travis Petty, 39, says former Judge Anthony McDonald defamed him in a Facebook post that called him a “narcissist and an ass” who should be disbarred from practicing law.

McDonald, 59, used the social media platform to air not only his opinion about Petty’s tie dispute with President Judge Gary Norton, but to make public Petty’s wife for months had an emergency protection-from-abuse order in place to keep Petty away from her.

McDonald issued that PFA in November 2025. The order was lifted this February after Petty and his wife came to an out-of-court agreement, court records show.

But Petty said McDonald’s post about him made “several false, defamatory and disparaging statements,” including saying the PFA remained in place when it had been withdrawn. And he said McDonald refused to remove the post when asked.

“He should get his checkbook ready. If he would have just taken it down, this would not have been done,” Petty said Wednesday.

Meanwhile, McDonald said he stands by his social media post and the statements he made about Petty online.

‘Should be disbarred’

McDonald posted the following to Facebook April 4; it’s presented here as written, without editing or correction:

“Travis Petty is a narcissist and an ass. I told him he can wear a dress if he wants to. His dress needed be professional. I offered to refer to him as Sir, miss, they, them. Whatever the preference. He started shaking and smacked me, a robed judge, In my chest with his files. Said I should recuse myself from all of his cases. I disagreed. Sam is correct. Petty should not be an attorney let alone a an administrate law judge. He is a disgrace and should be disbarred. He has a PFA against him by his wife. Cocaine use. Drugs. Abusing his children and wife. Had an

exchange student in the house. The person was so afraid they went back to their country. This is the man who questioned my professionalism. My integrity. My ability to be Judge. He had “friends” write letters two weeks before the election questioning my integrity. What do you think now Franny Fraley? I never had a cross word with you. Was shocked when you and your husband attacked me. Shame. Now that am no longer a Judge i am thinking of posting the PFA. Shocking. This is the man you people supported. Proud of yourselves?”

As of Wednesday, it had been shared by others 17 times; 64 people had “liked” it.

In the lawsuit filed this week, which included the post as an exhibit, Petty emphasizes that McDonald described the PFA in the present tense, even though it was withdrawn some two months ago: “[McDonald] said that the plaintiff (Petty) HAS a PFA against him by his wife,” and that Petty was “abusing his children and wife.”

Judge granted PFA in November

It was McDonald, then a judge, who issued the emergency PFA against Petty in November at the request of Petty’s wife, Sarah, court records show.

In an interview Wednesday, Petty disputed most of the claims in that filing.

But in her petition, filed last Nov. 25, Sarah Petty told the court Travis Petty, her estranged husband, had threatened her when she went to his Berwick home to pick up their two sons before school Nov. 24.

When she arrived, the boys answered the door and she began to collect their belongings inside, the PFA petition says.

Sarah Petty told the court Travis Petty “blocked” her from leaving a bathroom, and began to “aggressively berate” her by yelling and ripping a suitcase from her hands as the children watched.

Filings state Sarah Petty told her husband she would seek a PFA, at which point he turned to the boys and asked them if they had seen him hit their mother.

“I didn’t hit her. Did you see me hit her? You didn’t, did you?” Sarah Petty’s petition quotes Travis Petty as saying.

The wife told the court in her filing there had been previous run-ins with Travis Petty that left her frightened.

On April 15, 2025, Sarah Petty said, she found a container of “white powder” in Travis Petty’s recliner.

According to the petition, when she asked him about it, Travis Petty “simply responded, ‘can I have it back?’ ”

Sarah Petty told the court she confronted Travis Petty about his “cocaine use” two days later during an argument about him taking the boys to New York City to see “The Lion King” on Broadway. The petition says Sarah Petty was “afraid” to travel with her husband because of his drug use.

According to filings, during that argument, Travis Petty raised a hand toward his wife “to strike her,” leaving her afraid.

At the time, a foreign exchange student was living with the Pettys. The student asked Sarah Petty if he should return home, filings state.

“[Petty] uses controlled substances, including cocaine and marijuana,” Sarah Petty’s PFA petition states.

The emergency petition, granted by McDonald, was dismissed by visiting Judge Charles Saylor Feb. 10 because Sarah and Travis Petty signed a mutual no-contact order that basically forbade them from speaking to each other unless they were conversing about the children, court records show.

Petty said Wednesday most of what was in the PFA filings was untrue, with the exception of Sarah Petty's claims of substance abuse, for which he is now seeking treatment.

"I am currently addressing any concerns as they relate to substance abuse," he said.

Saylor was assigned the case last year after McDonald, Norton and Judge Richard Knecht recused themselves, filings show.

Tie topic

Petty's objections to McDonald's Facebook post extend to the former judge's description of an encounter between them after McDonald halted court proceedings to ask Petty to put on a tie.

In a private hallway, McDonald asked Petty to don a tie. Petty refused.

He later told the Press Enterprise it was his way of staging a "silent protest" against McDonald's appointment to the bench.

McDonald said Wednesday that Petty pointed out a female district attorney was not told to wear a tie. The then-judge told Petty he could wear a dress if he wanted, so long as he dressed professionally.

In the suit filed Tuesday, Petty says McDonald's Facebook post "alluded" to him being transgender by making mention of McDonald giving Petty permission to wear a dress in court and offering to refer to him as "miss, they them."

Petty also takes issue with McDonald's claims Petty "smacked" him in the chest with files while the two spoke in the hallway outside the courtroom.

Petty said Wednesday he never touched McDonald, and such an action would be considered contempt of court or even a felony assault charge.

Take-down request

McDonald said Wednesday that Petty asked him to take the Facebook post down in a text exchange April 5.

Petty includes the text exchange in his lawsuit:

"Not a chance in hell," McDonald says in response. "... Be lucky I haven't posted the PFA."

McDonald's text asks Petty when he would stop "unrelenting attacks" against him. He then asks Petty to sit down and talk.

"...You heard a nonsense PFA, ex parte, and then ordered no contact with my children right before the holidays, which was greater relief than what was requested..." Petty says in response.

McDonald then asks Petty to apologize for “all you have done to me.”

“You can’t be serious. You can post whatever you want about me so long as it is truthful and honest,” Petty replies.

‘I can prove everything’

McDonald said he had not yet seen or been served a copy of the lawsuit when a reporter called Wednesday morning.

“I am comfortable that I can prove everything that was said in my Facebook post,” McDonald said. “It is my intention to file a counter complaint.” He declined to say what that might say.

McDonald said the two had another conversation Monday in which Petty was “gentlemanly” and offered to have the lawsuit paperwork served at his Berwick office instead of his home.

In his lawsuit, Petty asks a judge to award him monetary damages, and issue an injunction to stop McDonald from posting things about him online.

“You aren’t allowed to say things that aren’t true about people. His post was riddled with false statements and inaccuracies,” Petty said.

No tie motion

As for Petty’s refusal to wear a tie, he has not yet filed his promised motion asking Judge Norton to reconsider the court order mandating he wear one.

He said at least for now, he is focusing on suing McDonald for defamation.

But, he has found case law from New Jersey to support his case against neckwear. “A female attorney was thrown out of court for wearing pants,” he said. “New Jersey Superior Court ruled that judges can’t make a woman wear a skirt or dress. I just want non-gender specific rules to apply in court.”

M.J. Mahon covers Bloomsburg; she can be reached at 570-218-7536 or mj.mahon@pressenterprise.net.

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Lawyer is suing former judge

Berwick attorney in flap over tie objects to online post

By N.W. BROWN
 BERWICK — A former Berwick judge is suing a local attorney who posted an online article that accused him of sexual harassment. The lawsuit was filed in Berwick County Court on Tuesday.

The article, published on the website of the Berwick Press-Enterprise, accused Judge Robert J. Berwick of sexual harassment. The article stated that Judge Berwick had a sexual relationship with a woman who was a former employee of his law firm. The article also stated that Judge Berwick had a sexual relationship with another woman who was a former employee of his law firm.

Judge Berwick denied the allegations and stated that he had a professional relationship with the women. He stated that he had a sexual relationship with the first woman while he was a judge and that he had a sexual relationship with the second woman while he was an attorney.

The attorney, Robert J. Berwick, stated that he was the author of the article and that he was not responsible for the content. He stated that he was a former judge and that he was not responsible for the content of the article.

The lawsuit seeks damages for the attorney's emotional distress and for the attorney's legal fees. The attorney is also seeking an injunction to prevent the article from being published again.

Should be disbanded
 The Berwick Press-Enterprise is a local newspaper that has been in operation since 1887. The newspaper is owned by the Berwick Press-Enterprise Company. The newspaper is published daily except on Sundays and public holidays.

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