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Powerful Ga judge resigns; accused of violating ethics by indefinitely jailing defendants

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By Associated Press, Updated: Tuesday, December 20, 3:28 PM

ATLANTA — A powerful south Georgia judge will resign rather than answer damaging accusations that she abused her authority by indefinitely jailing defendants, allowed family members to appear in cases before her and other “tyrannical” behavior, state officials said Tuesday.

Brunswick Superior Court Judge Amanda F. Williams said in a letter to Gov. Nathan Deal that she would resign on Jan. 2 after 21 years on the bench. She also said in a separate consent order with the Judicial Qualifications Commission that she would never again seek judicial office or senior judge status.

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misconduct allegations that portrayed her as a power-hungry jurist who flouted state ethical guidelines. The judge and her attorney did not return repeated calls seeking comment on Monday and Tuesday.

The commission, which filed the accusations in November, doesn’t have the power to file criminal charges. But the complaint said Williams made several “material false statements” to investigators in violation of a Georgia law that makes it a crime to lie to government authorities. State and federal prosecutors have declined comment on whether she could face criminal charges.

Williams, 64, is the chief judge of a sprawling south Georgia judicial circuit that made her one of the most powerful officials in the area. She has been in the position since 1990 and oversaw the largest of Georgia’s drug courts, designed to allow some offenders to avoid prison if they get clean through treatment programs.

The complaint made a series of explosive allegations. Included was that she violated a judicial canon that “prohibits you from ‘using tyrannical partiality in the administration or under the color of (your) office.’”

Investigators said in 2008 she ordered a drug-court defendant with a history of suicide attempts to be jailed in solitary confinement, with no access to visitors except a drug counselor, until the judge ordered her released. The complaint says the woman spent 73 days in solitary confinement and tried to kill herself while in jail.

One man was sent to jail for two weeks for disputing what he believed was a false positive drug test, the complaint said, and another was detained when he asked Williams to be excused from a Saturday class so he could attend a family function.

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that the defendant be summarily jailed," the complaint says.

She was also accused of nepotism because she presided over cases in which her husband, a lawyer, and other family members were involved in. She used "rude, abusive or insulting language" on the bench, the complaint said, and threatened defendants who dared to talk to her with jail time. Investigators said she sometimes wouldn't even tell the bailiffs taking the defendants into custody how long they would be held.

The accusations against Williams have swirled since she sought — and won — re-election to a sixth judicial term last year. Her critics also gained national attention in May when several of Williams' drug defendants were featured in an hour-long story on the public radio show "This American Life."

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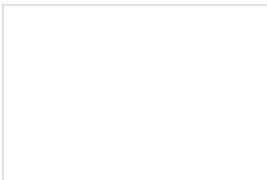
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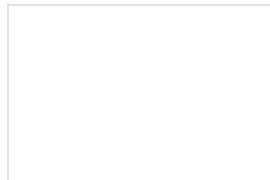
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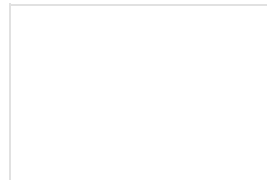
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