



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



MICHAEL L. RAMSEY
District Attorney

MARK MURPHY
Chief Deputy District Attorney

JASON WINES
Chief Investigator

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
September 5, 2023

LOCAL DEFENSE LAWYER GRANTED DIVERSION FOR CRIMES COMMITTED

A former Butte County criminal defense lawyer was granted mental health diversion on a felony charge of harboring a client, who was a wanted fugitive and her boyfriend, as well as misdemeanor charges for possessing methamphetamine and a smoking device, in Butte County Superior Court last week.

Stephana Linda Marie Femino, 48, of Paradise, was granted the diversion by a visiting judge last Friday, September 1, 2023, in her felony criminal case after claiming she committed her crimes as a result of mental illness that allowed her client/boyfriend to take advantage of her.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said as a result of the diversion, Femino does not face further prosecution or punishment for her alleged crimes as long as she follows a mental health treatment plan proposed by her attorney and approved by the judge for the next two years. If she continues treatment and does not commit any more crimes, her case will be dismissed as if it never happened.

Ramsey said his office adamantly opposed Femino's bid for diversion under a program recently created by the state legislature that allows people to be diverted from prosecution if they can show a connection between a mental health diagnosis and the crimes they committed. Ramsey said his office presented evidence that although Femino claimed various mental health conditions, they were entirely unrelated to her decision to harbor her fugitive client/ boyfriend from the law.

Despite this, the judge, visiting from Shasta County Superior Court, because all local Butte County judges disqualified themselves because of Femino's work in the local court, nonetheless found that Femino met the criteria for being diverted from the criminal justice system citing the fact that the diversion law makes it extremely difficult for the prosecution to overcome such a claim – even if it is tenuous at best.

Ramsey said the judge found her mental illness was a “significant factor” in her alleged crimes as a lawyer would not normally act in the way Femino did in protecting a client.

Ramsey said that Femino's “client” was Adam Ashford, 50, of Chico, who is currently in state prison on multiple felony counts of assault, evading, drug, and firearm offenses.

Ramsey said last year between May and June, Ashford failed to appear on several violations of a felony probation he was on, and the court issued warrants for his arrest. Ramsey said Femino, his lawyer and girlfriend, then undertook to provide Ashford with financial assistance to help him remain on the run, buying hotel rooms for them to stay in, and helping him avoid police contact by allowing him to hide in her law office.

Ramsey said that on June 24, 2022, Ashford was finally arrested near Butte College when officers found him driving a car with Femino as a passenger. As a result of the arrest, Ramsey said his investigators uncovered thousands of cell phone messages between Ashford and Femino, all while he was wanted on his warrants, showing Femino sending Ashford money, obtaining hotel rooms for him, and allowing him to hide in her law office.

Femino was later arrested on July 29, 2022, on a felony arrest warrant for her Harboring charge that was issued by a local judge. During the arrest, a search of her car in the courthouse parking lot revealed a small amount of methamphetamine and a smoking pipe that she claimed was a “client’s” items.

Femino was facing criminal consequences of up to three years in jail for her felony crime at the time of the diversion.

Femino’s license to practice law was suspended in December of 2022 by the California State Bar.