



NAACP

Pittsburgh Branch

Statement on Judge Tranquilli Allegations

The community must have faith in its courts. Allowing Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas Judge Mark Tranquilli to remain on the bench erodes that faith. Justice has never been meted out equally for African Americans in this country, yet there is a long standing prohibition on excluding jurors based on race. Tranquilli openly yearned for a time before that prohibition was in effect, where the color of a juror's skin was grounds for exclusion. There can be no fair administration of justice, when judges who are to be held to the highest of ethical standards display racist views. That those views were on full display while he was engaging in court business makes them all the more despicable. There also can be no fair administration of justice when citizens serving as jurors are denigrated based on the color of their skin.

In one flippant conversation, Tranquilli showed blatant disrespect for the centuries old tradition of African headdresses; invoked the racist trope of Mammy by referring to a Black woman juror as Aunt Jemima. He stereotyped her as having an attitude; as being an unwed mother; and even went as far as to cast her child's father as an addict. He ended by concluding that she should not have been permitted to serve on a jury due to these stereotypes. This is wholly and entirely unacceptable behavior from a judge.

These comments were not made in a vacuum, they reflect racist ideas and biases that undoubtedly influenced the case in question, and every other case he has presided over. Almost as disturbing, is Tranquilli's long career as an assistant district attorney, where he was in a position to abuse power, promote bigoted views and discriminate against African Americans as a "tough on crime" prosecutor. This is the type of systemic and structural racism that makes our region one of the worst places for African Americans to live. All that is needed for these forms of discrimination to fester and grow is for people of good conscience to abide the racism of their peers, and superiors.

That Tranquilli felt comfortable espousing these views, in his tax-payer funded office, while engaging with other members of the bar is appalling. It is pleasantly ironic that it fell upon Judge Kim Clark, the first African American to achieve the distinction of President Judge in Allegheny County, to review and act on these allegations. Under other circumstances, these statements could have been made about her, as a Black woman. We urge the Judicial Conduct Board to conduct a full, transparent, and through investigation into Tranquilli, and impose appropriate sanctions, including, but not limited to his suspension and removal from the bench. Furthermore, we call for the Pennsylvania Attorney General to review Tranquilli's record as an assistant district attorney for potential racially motivated misconduct.