

# Judge: Lawyer practiced during own contempt case

**By Deborah Pines**  
Staff Writer

A prominent White Plains divorce lawyer, who has delayed contempt-of-court proceedings against herself since November by claiming medical disability, has handled at least two other cases since then, a judge said yesterday.

While on medical leave for "major depression," Doris Sassower has worked on a fee-dispute case and a federal lawsuit she and her daughter filed against a cooperative board that refused to sell them a unit, state Supreme Court Justice Samuel G. Fredman said yesterday.



**Doris Sassower**

Fredman said the federal court case involved Sassower, 57, apparently writing a legal paper dated as recently as April 9, and devoting two full days to questioning witnesses on March 5 and March 6, filling 675 transcript pages.

"I've been deluged with such information," the judge said. He added angrily, "Lawyers' licenses are at stake."

The judge did not elaborate on the licenses remark. But the "Code of Professional Responsibility" for attorneys bars "dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation" and even "the appearance of impropriety." Code violations can lead to discipline ranging from private reprimands to suspension or disbarment.

Fredman's comments came during a special hearing he called to question Sassower's psychiatrist, Theodore Cherbuliez of Scarsdale, on the extent of her illness. Information from Cherbuliez prompted Fredman to grant delays in the contempt hearings on Nov. 14, Jan. 9, and Wednesday. The hearings, which could result in a fine or other sanction against Sassower, a former president of the New York state Women's Bar Association, began July 27.

In testimony yesterday, Cherbuliez said he still considered Sassower to be "very unstable" and believed she should not be working.

"One of the problems with Mrs. Sassower is her not following advice," Cherbuliez said, "which, in my opinion, does not invalidate the advice."

Under questioning from Fredman, Cherbuliez said he did not consider Sassower sick enough to require a court-appointed guardian. He said she most likely was capable of picking an attorney to represent her.

Fredman said he would review a transcript of the doctor's testimony and the law before deciding how to proceed.

The judge said he already has established "in my mind" that Sassower is in contempt by failing, when ordered by a judge, to give a former client's file to the woman's new attorney, Harvey Landau of White Plains.

When the contempt hearings resume, Landau will testify to help him decide whether Sassower should pay damages, the judge said. The damages would be the cost to Landau or the client for delays or for legal expenses incurred securing the file from Sassower.

The contempt proceedings against Sassower have focused on whether she willfully kept the file and failed to make a scheduled court appearance.

Sassower has maintained there was no contempt because she since returned the file in July and the missed appearance by herself or a representative was a scheduling misunderstanding.

When called yesterday, her daughter, Elena Sassower, answered the phone and said her mother handled the federal case because U.S. Magistrate Joel J. Tyler threatened to dismiss it if she did not.

She said her mother never appeared in the fee-dispute case. She said papers submitted with her mother's signature were prepared by someone else although her mother read them.

She accused the judge of starting the contempt action as a way to get publicity for his November election bid. Although Fredman ultimately was cross-endorsed by Democrats and Republicans, he was campaigning when the hearings began in July, she said.

In response, the judge yesterday said, "I wouldn't even comment on such a fallacious and meritless statement."

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