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‘You Were Not a Nice Person’: Federal Judge Sentences Brooklyn Lawyer on Obstruction Charges

U.S. District Senior Judge Leo Glasser told Brooklyn attorney Lydia Hills she would have been complicit in sending an old woman to jail had her aunt, whom she implicated in a short-sale scheme, been fit to stand trial.

By **Jane Wester** | November 08, 2019 at 02:20 PM

A judge in the Eastern District of New York spent nearly an hour reprimanding Brooklyn attorney Lydia Hills before sentencing her to four years' probation Friday, telling her that even though her crime was not particularly serious, she harmed her aunt and did not seem to be taking appropriate responsibility.

Hills was found guilty of obstructing an official proceeding and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding in March. As a solo practitioner who was also a licensed real estate broker, Hills got involved in a short-sale scheme with her aunt and a man described by U.S. District Senior Judge I. Leo Glasser as a “con man.”

Glasser found that Hills’ aunt, who is in her 70s, was not competent to stand trial. If he hadn’t done that, he told Hills that she would have been complicit in sending an old woman to jail just a few years after her aunt had finished a six-year sentence for a separate fraud charge.

Hills spoke at length in court, apologizing for trying to complete a transaction without sufficient experience. She said she wanted to make her family proud by helping her aunt and talked about how she wanted to stay out of prison to raise her three children and breastfeed her fourth child, who is due soon.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Martin Coffey had recommended that Hills go to prison for two to three years, but he suggested that the court consider sentencing her to a term that began after she gave birth.

Glasser said in court that some judges would be offended by Hills’ statement, telling her that transcripts of her calls show that her crime was intentional and not caused by a lack of experience.

“You knew what you were putting at risk because you made reference to it on several occasions,” Glasser said. “I think it’s important, Ms. Hills, that you be honest with yourself and face what it is you did.”

Hills and her aunt conspired to make a secret cash sale of properties in Queens to conceal the money from federal prosecutors, because her aunt

owed nearly \$20 million in forfeiture and restitution costs, according to prosecutors.

Glasser noted that a much smaller amount of money—about \$33,000—was involved in the real estate transaction, but he repeatedly said Hills “was not a nice person” because she knew what she was doing and involved her aunt.

Still, with a dozen of Hills’ friends and family members looking on, Glasser said that not being a nice person is not a reason to send someone to prison, and he finally delivered his sentence of probation.

Hills’ status as an attorney is pending with the Second Judicial Department, her lawyers Bruce Barket and Danielle Muscatello of Barket Epstein Kearon Aldea & LoTurco said. A state felony conviction is automatic cause for disbarment, but because there is no exact state equivalent for Hills’ federal felony, her legal future is less clear.

In the Second Department’s grievance committee, a motion has been made for her suspension rather than disbarment, Barket and Muscatello said.