

Mary Chrzanowski is a no-nonsense judge. Some have called her "Scary Mary", accusing her of being out of line on many occasions.

Melonie Jackson, 45, went before Judge Chrzanowski in Macomb County in Michigan when she was going through a nasty custody and divorce battle. Jackson represented herself because she could not afford an attorney.

"I truly fear the family judicial system for anybody," Melonie told FOX 11 News. "Anything I've tried to do to protect my child, the harder they came at me, the more they came at me."

She was fighting to keep custody of her 8-year-old daughter. She knew enough about the law to see that her husband's lawyer had made a mistake. He never filed a divorce complaint which was needed to fight for child custody. She kept telling the judge the case was invalid.

Melonie said, "I kept saying to the judge, 'There's no foundation. There's no jurisdiction. There's been no complaint for divorce filed.'"

The attorney for Melonie's ex then accused her in court of violating an agreed-upon child visitation schedule. She says her signature was forged, and she knew nothing about a visitation schedule. She said it was proven that it was a fraudulent, forged document. But, at the time it didn't matter. Judge Chrzanowski paid close attention to what opposing counsel had to say.

Melonie said, "Every time I tried to speak up and say, 'This isn't a document of the court', she literally told me to shut up or I was going to lock up. Just like that. Just like that." Audio from court video shows the judge saying, "A fine is not going to get your attention. Anybody have any suggestions? Because right now, you're looking at 30 days in a county jail."

This is what Melonie got—a 30-day jail sentence. And even though this was a civil matter, Melonie was criminally charged and ended up with a criminal record. After 10 days of being in jail, Melonie said she was pulled out in shackles and handcuffs when the courtroom is filled with her ex's friends and family while the judge tells her she's losing all parental rights to her child for no reason.

After 3 years of court battles, Judge Chrzanowski finally discovered that a divorce complaint had never been filed.

A clip from the court video shows the judge saying, "I have a mess here because I have two files that are open. I don't know why we have a DM file open if there's no complaint for divorce in it."

Melonie tried to explain this is exactly what she'd been pointing out year after year, but the judge still would not accept it.

The clip from the court video explains the interaction:

JUDGE: "That doesn't change anything we've done with a custody issue Melonie"

MELONIE: "Yes, it does your honor."

JUDGE: No it doesn't. I'm not going back and re-hearing it. I'm telling you that right now. So, you might as well get in the car and go to the court of appeals right now!"

We asked why wasn't this case thrown out. Melonie said, "A lot of the attorneys that are investigating the case and looking at it now are saying 'That's not the law. How did they get away with that. How did this happen?'

We tried to get a response from Judge Chrzanowski but she never returned our phone calls.

FOX 11 Legal Analyst Robin Sax says it may be hard to believe, but bad behavior behind the bench is not an isolated problem. She says, "Over and over, I'm seeing cases where judges love to grand stand and love to make the opportunity to make their own career. You can't forget that judges before they were judges were lawyers, and while we expect them to act with dignity when they put on the black robe. Sometimes they just act like lawyers."

In order to fix this, Robin says, "My advice to people out there who are experiencing bad judges is to tell their story and tell it often on websites, blogs, judicial committees, is to file complaints,

talk to the media, and tell your story until someone listens. Because the only way the public knows about these outrageous cases is by people who have suffered through to talk about them."

Melonie filed a complaint with the judicial tenure commission. Chrzanowski was removed from this case, but Melonie still does not have custody of her daughter.

The Court of Appeals did reverse the criminal contempt against her, and the FBI is investigating the forgery. The state supreme court is reviewing the validity of the whole case.

For Melonie, the hardest thing is trying to make the best of the agonizing process for her little girl.

More Links

[Judge Chrzanowski's profile on the Macomb County, Michigan website](#)

[How to file a complaint in the State of California](#)

[The form for filing a complaint \(PDF File\)](#)

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