

Judge Continues Jenifer O'Neal Sentencing to 1 p.m. After Courtroom Dispute Over Defense Filings

Judge Mark Kearney continued the hearing to 1 p.m. after O'Neal said she was dissatisfied with her attorney, as disputes over financial disclosures and late-filed support letters drew objections from prosecutors Thursday morning.

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Jenifer O'Neal arriving at the District court in St. Thomas Thursday morning with one of her sons. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

The sentencing hearing for former Office of Management and Budget Director Jenifer O'Neal was continued to 1 p.m. Thursday after a morning proceeding became consumed by disputes over defense filings, financial disclosures and O'Neal's dissatisfaction with her attorney's handling of

the matter.

O'Neal appeared before U.S. District Judge Mark Kearney in federal court to face sentencing in the Mon Ethos corruption case, following her conviction alongside former V.I. Police Commissioner Ray Martinez. But before the court could move into sentencing, questions arose over whether key defense materials had been properly filed and whether O'Neal had provided financial information requested through the probation process.

O'Neal told the court she had concerns with the representation provided by her attorney, Attorney Dale Lionel Smith, and said she was just learning that her sentencing memorandum had not been properly filed. She said she believed the deadline had passed, did not see anything on the docket, and that hearing the issue raised in court was "a major concern."

"This is my life we're talking about," O'Neal told the court. She said she did not know how to proceed under the circumstances.

The issue prompted O'Neal to request that sentencing be postponed to a later date. Prosecutors objected, with the government describing the request as another delay tactic by the defense. U.S. Department of Justice Trial Attorney Alexandre Dempsey said the U.S. would only agree to a continuance if O'Neal were remanded to custody Thursday.

Judge Kearney instead continued the hearing until 1 p.m.

The morning proceeding also exposed a dispute over letters of support submitted on O'Neal's behalf. Judge Kearney said he had read the letters, but could not consider them at sentencing unless they were filed on the public docket. Smith said some individuals who wrote letters did not want their names made public, but the judge said the court could only consider materials properly filed. Smith ultimately agreed to file them publicly, with appropriate redactions, and the letters were placed on the docket during the hearing.

The letters included submissions from several known individuals, including Hugo Hodge, Jean-Pierre Oriol, Raymond Williams and Clifford Graham. They also included letters from J. Daniel, Ashley Scotland, Nathalie Benjamin and others, totaling 24 letters of support.

A separate dispute involved O'Neal's financial disclosures. The court discussed a waiver connected to the probation office that would have allowed financial records to be included as part of the sentencing process. O'Neal said she had "absolutely no issue providing financial information" and had answered questions posed by the probation officer, indicating that any failure to provide the information was not because she personally refused to cooperate.

Prosecutors said the government stood by the probation office's account and argued that O'Neal and her defense had long been aware of the need to provide the information, referencing communications dating back to April 2026. Smith said he had concerns with the scope of the waiver and described parts of the request as intrusive, but maintained that O'Neal was willing to provide financial information and that the issue could be fixed.

Judge Kearney indicated that the matter should not have remained unresolved on the morning of sentencing. At one point, the judge admonished Smith not to further harm his client as the discussion continued over what had or had not been filed and what the court could properly consider.

Thursday morning's hearing unfolded in sharp contrast to the sentencing proceedings for Martinez and David Whitaker, both of whom already received prison sentences in the Mon Ethos case. Martinez was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison after Judge Kearney said his conduct represented a grave betrayal of public trust. Whitaker, the Mon Ethos contractor who cooperated with prosecutors, was sentenced to 22 months in prison and ordered to pay \$600,000 in restitution.

O'Neal, by contrast, entered Thursday's hearing with unresolved questions over her sentencing materials and financial disclosures. Only a handful of supporters appeared in court on her behalf, a notably smaller showing than the crowd that attended Martinez's sentencing.

O'Neal was convicted in December alongside Martinez following a federal corruption trial involving Mon Ethos Pro Support, government contractor David Whitaker, bribery allegations, money laundering conspiracy and public corruption. Prosecutors alleged that O'Neal, then OMB director, participated in the corrupt handling of government payments tied to Mon Ethos. Whitaker's testimony became central to the government's case against both Martinez and O'Neal.

The sentencing hearing is expected to resume at 1 p.m.

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