

# [***Fani Willis' Office Is Pushing Lawyers Out of Fulton County: Attorney***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BGS-2TD1-JBR6-91W0-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Katherine Fung

**Highlight:** Atlanta-based defense attorney Robert Wilson told Newsweek many wouldn't be shocked by Willis' misconduct allegations if they were familiar with her office.

**Body**

Georgia District Attorney [*Fani Willis*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/fani-willis?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)' office is pushing defense lawyers out of Fulton County because of its hostile conduct toward them, Atlanta-based defense attorney Robert Wilson said.

"There's a consensus that Fulton County is kind of an outlier in how they conduct themselves," Wilson told *Newsweek* on Wednesday. "I've had several conversations where people have said, 'If the business could pick up elsewhere, I would stop practicing in Fulton because it's just such a headache to do work there.'"

Willis has come under immense scrutiny after a court filing in January revealed that she was in a romantic relationship with the attorney whom she appointed as the lead prosecutor in Georgia's election interference case against [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and 18 co-defendants. Although Willis and Wade's relationship has raised questions about whether the alleged conflict of interest is enough to disqualify her office from the case, Wilson said the complaints about her office go much deeper than the recent scandal.

Wilson, who previously served on Trump co-defendant Kenneth Chesebro's defense team before his client reached a plea deal with prosecutors, said Willis' office is unusually hostile to defense attorneys in a way that isn't seen in other metro Atlanta jurisdictions, like Cobb County, or even in the federal court in Atlanta.

Over the phone, Wilson painted a picture of a "contentious" work environment for defense attorneys, describing how they have bags searched by security in ways that prosecutors do not, criticizing the "crazy" plea offers that Fulton County prosecutors refuse to negotiate, and taking issue with how frequently the DA's office uses the state's racketeering laws to go after defendants.

*Newsweek* reached out to Willis' office via email for comment on Wilson's criticisms.

"It makes the administration of justice just really difficult," Wilson said. "They don't answer the phone, they don't respond to your emails. You're just trying to work this out and do what's best for your clients, and you're just constantly hit with an ineffective system."

When the misconduct allegations about Willis came out, Wilson said, he could understand why some observers might wonder if anyone cares if the DA is working with her boyfriend. Given that it's likely their first look at the DA's office, Wilson said he agrees with that sentiment to some extent.

"But if you know the full story of what happens in Fulton County all the time, it's framed much differently," he said. "I already know they're doing things poorly over there. And now on top of all that, three-quarters of a million dollars has gone to an unqualified guy who the DA is also in a personal relationship with. When you compound that with all the other things you know about Fulton County, it just seems crazy."

Wilson pointed to several instances where prosecutors with Willis' office were particularly aggressive toward defense attorneys in the Willis disqualification hearings that have been held over the past month. He criticized Fulton County prosecutors, like Chief Deputy District Attorney Adam Abbate, for portraying defense attorney Ashleigh Merchant, who first made the explosive claim about Willis and Wade, as a liar in open court.

"Abbate gets up and, literally in an open court, calls for sanctions against Ashley Merchant and says that all of this is unfounded and that she should be sanctioned," Wilson said. "And then at the next hearing it comes out that Ashleigh actually does have a good basis for doing all of this."

"The gall to stand up and ask for sanctions against another attorney, that is severe," he continued. "Ashleigh had a good-faith basis. We saw it come out in testimony, even if [witness Terrence] Bradley was dancing around what was happening. We saw the text. We saw that she had at least some reason to bring this motion, and for the DA's office to get up there, for the elected DA to scream 'these are lies,' it's just insanity."

During last week's hearing, Merchant took issue with the prosecution calling her a liar, which the DA's office denied. Shortly afterward, a slide put up by the office during the hearing read: "Merchant represented to this Court that Bradley had personal firsthand knowledge of it ALL, of everything, that he would be an impeaching machine... LIES, LIES, LIES."

Wilson said that while there may be a lot of ***politics*** surrounding the Trump case in Fulton County, the conduct of Willis' office has been the same for criminal defendants who are not as high profile as those involved in Georgia's election interference case. He criticized the DA for lowering the evidentiary rules in criminal trials in what he sees as "a manipulation of the system in order to more easily get convictions."

"I don't think something like that would happen anywhere other than in Fulton County," he said. "It's really disheartening to me to see the behavior of the Fulton DA's office like that."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2358384/fani-willis-fulton-county.jpg)

**Graphic**

Fani Willis Fulton County

Alex Slitz/Getty Images

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis looks on during a hearing at the Fulton County Courthouse on March 1, 2024, in Atlanta, Georgia. Robert Wilson told Newsweek he knows several defense attorneys who have considered not leaving Fulton County because of the way the district attorney's office's conducts itself.

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