



U.S. NEWS

# Order to drop New York Mayor Adams' case roils Justice Department as high-ranking officials resign

1 of 4 | New York City Mayor Eric Adams on Tuesday thanked the Justice Department for ordering a halt to his criminal corruption case, castigating the prosecution as "cruel" while vowing to regain the trust of voters ahead of his upcoming

BY LARRY NEUMEISTER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER AND [ERIC TUCKER](#)

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NEW YORK (AP) — Manhattan's top federal prosecutor, [Danielle Sassoon](#), and five high-ranking Justice Department officials resigned Thursday after she refused an [order](#) to drop [corruption charges](#) against New York City Mayor [Eric Adams](#) — a stunning escalation in a dayslong standoff over the Trump administration prioritizing political aims over criminal culpability.

Sassoon, a Republican who was interim U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, accused the department of acceding to a "quid pro quo" — dropping the case to ensure Adams' help with Trump's immigration agenda — and said she was "confident" the Democratic mayor committed the crimes spelled out in his indictment, and even more. Before the showdown, Sassoon said, prosecutors had been preparing to charge Adams with destroying evidence and instructing others to destroy evidence and provide false information to the FBI.

"I remain baffled by the rushed and superficial process by which this decision was reached," Sassoon wrote Trump's new attorney general, Pam Bondi, on Wednesday. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the letter.

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The acting deputy U.S. attorney general, former Trump personal lawyer Emil Bove, had ordered on Monday that the Adams case be dropped. He told Sassoon, in a letter accepting her resignation that she was "incapable of fairly and impartially" reviewing the circumstances of the case. Bove placed case prosecutors on administrative leave and said they and Sassoon would be subject to internal investigations.

[In Bove's letter](#), also obtained by the AP, he said the Justice Department in Washington would file a motion to drop Adams' charges and bar "further targeting" of the mayor. As of Thursday evening, Adams' case was still active and no new paperwork had been filed.

The department's public integrity section, which had been asked to take over the case, was also roiled by resignations.

The acting chief, three deputy chiefs and a deputy assistant attorney general in the criminal division who oversaw the section resigned, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters.

The departures amounted to a stunning condemnation of the actions of the department's leadership just days after a close Trump ally, former Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi, was sworn in as attorney general. Just three weeks into Trump's second term, the department has been rocked by firings, transfers and resignations.

Adams pleaded not guilty last September to charges that while in his prior role as Brooklyn borough president, he accepted over \$100,000 in illegal campaign contributions and lavish travel perks such as expensive flight upgrades, luxury hotel stays and even a trip to a bathhouse from people wanting to buy his influence. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Federal agents had also been investigating some of Adams' aides. It was unclear what will happen to that part of the investigation.

In a memo Monday, Bove had directed Sassoon to drop the case as soon as practicable, so the mayor of America's largest city could help with Trump's immigration crackdown and could himself [campaign for reelection](#) unencumbered by criminal charges. Adams faces multiple challengers in June's primary.

On Wednesday, after two days without action or public statements from Sassoon's office, [Bondi said she would](#) "look into" why the case had yet to be dismissed. That same day, Sassoon laid out her objections to dropping the case in an eight-page letter to the attorney general.

Sassoon accused Adams' lawyers of offering what amounted to a "quid pro quo" — the mayor's assistance to the White House on immigration if the case were dropped — when they met with Justice Department officials in Washington last month.

"It is a breathtaking and dangerous precedent to reward Adams's opportunistic and shifting commitments on immigration and other policy matters with dismissal of a criminal indictment," Sassoon wrote.

Adams' lawyer, Alex Spiro, said Thursday the "quid pro quo" claim was a "total lie."

"We offered nothing and the department asked nothing of us," Spiro wrote in an email to the AP. "We were asked if the case had any bearing on national security and immigration enforcement and

we truthfully answered it did."

The dueling letters from Sassoon in New York and Bove in Washington laid bare in starkly personal language the gravity of a simmering, behind-the-scenes dispute over the handling of one of the Justice Department's most significant current public corruption cases.

The outcome not only threatens to create an irrevocable fissure in the relationship between department headquarters and one of its largest and most prestigious prosecutor's offices, but also risks reinforcing the perception that the administration will employ a transactional approach to law enforcement decisions.

The U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of New York has a track record of tackling Wall Street malfeasance, political corruption and international terrorism. It has a tradition of independence from Washington, earned it the nickname "the sovereign district."

Matthew Podolsky, who has spent a decade in the office, was made the new acting U.S. attorney after Sassoon's departure. He was named Sassoon's top deputy only days ago.

Bove's directive to drop the case was all the more remarkable because Bove had been a longtime prosecutor and supervisor in the Southern District, and because department leaders are historically reluctant to intervene in cases where charges have been brought. Bove, who went into private practice before rejoining government, represented Trump as a defense lawyer in his recent criminal cases.

Bove's memo steered clear of any legal basis for the dismissal. His emphasis on political considerations, rather than evaluating the strength of the evidence, alarmed some career prosecutors who said it was a departure from long-standing norms.

Sassoon, a former clerk for the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, was not the prosecutor who charged Adams. That was then-U.S. Attorney Damian Williams, who stepped down after Trump won reelection.

Sassoon was appointed as interim U.S. attorney Jan. 21, the day after Trump took office, and it was supposed to be a short-term assignment. Trump in November said he would nominate Jay Clayton, a former U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission chairman.

This is the second Justice Department tussle in five years between Washington and New York to result in a dramatic leadership turnover. In 2020, during Trump's first term, then-U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman was pushed out in a surprise nighttime announcement. Berman initially refused to resign, creating a brief standoff with the then-U.S. attorney general, William Barr, but he did leave after being assured his investigations into Trump's allies would not be disturbed.

Prosecutors said they had proof that Adams personally directed political aides to solicit foreign donations and disguise them to help the campaign qualify for a city program that provides a generous, publicly-funded match for small dollar donations. Under federal law, foreign nationals are banned from contributing to U.S. election campaigns.

As recently as Jan. 6, prosecutors had indicated their investigation remained active, writing in court papers that they continued to "uncover additional criminal conduct by Adams." —

Richer and Tucker reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Jake Offenhartz and Michael

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