

## Jan. 6 Witness' Lawyer Under Fire: Ethics Probe Urged by Watchdog Group



A legal group called Lawyers Defending American Democracy has filed an ethics complaint against Stefan C. Passantino, a former White House lawyer, with ethics regulators in Georgia, New York, and Washington, D.C. The complaint follows testimony from former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson, who claimed that Passantino advised her to downplay her knowledge of events leading up to the attack on the U.S. Capitol on 6 January 2021. The complaint alleges that Passantino's advice was intended to protect former President Donald Trump and was not in Hutchinson's best interests.

Hutchinson had initially retained Passantino to represent her but later obtained a new lawyer before providing damaging testimony to the congressional committee investigating the events of 6 January 2021. Hutchinson claimed that Passantino told her that "the less you remember, the better" and advised her not to volunteer information or attempt to refresh her memory. Passantino's law firm also represented Hutchinson's former boss, Mark Meadows, at the time.

The complaint alleges that Passantino did not provide Hutchinson with a formal engagement letter and that whether his representation of Hutchinson had been entered into his firm's conflicts system is still being determined. The complaint also claims that Passantino told Hutchinson that she would get an excellent job in "Trump world" after her testimony was over and that his fees were being paid by "Trump world." The Save America Leadership PAC later confirmed that it had paid Passantino's legal fees after Hutchinson contacted a contact connected to the PAC requesting a referral to a lawyer and financial assistance.

Martha Barnett, a former president of the American Bar Association and a board member of Lawyers Defending American Democracy, was among the officials who signed the request for an ethics investigation. In a press release, Barnett alleged that Passantino's attempt to interfere with the administration of justice could constitute "possibly criminal behavior" and said that his actions "undermine the carefully crafted rules guiding the attorney-client relationship."

Passantino has denied any wrongdoing and has said that he represented Hutchinson "honorably, ethically and fully consistent with her sole interests as she communicated them to me." He has also produced documents gathered by Hutchinson to the congressional committee and provided her with "customary advice" about telling the truth and being precise in her testimony. Ross Garber, a lawyer for Passantino, noted that Hutchinson had not filed the ethics complaint herself and said that "anyone can write a letter to the bar complaining about any lawyer."

Another group, the 65 Project, also seeks an ethics investigation of Passantino in Georgia. The complaint against Passantino is the latest development in the ongoing investigation into the events of 6 January 2021 and the role played by former President Trump and his supporters.

In conclusion, Lawyers Defending American Democracy and the 65 Project seek ethics investigations of Stefan C. Passantino, the former White House lawyer representing Cassidy Hutchinson, a former White House aide who testified before the 6 January 2021 committee about events regarding the U.S. Capitol attack. The complaints allege that Passantino provided advice contrary to Hutchinson's best interests and instead intended to protect former President Donald Trump. Passantino denies any wrongdoing and maintains that he represented Hutchinson "honorably, ethically and fully consistent with her sole interests as she communicated them to me." The outcome of the ethics investigations could have significant implications for the legal profession and the administration of justice.