

# Bruno: McCoy "destroyed my life"

## Testimony damning against county commissioner

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During this week's federal jury trial of Celeste Bruno vs. Monroe County, the former executive assistant to then-county Mayor Charles "Sonny" McCoy didn't mince words: "You're damn right I want revenge," Bruno testified Tuesday. "My life was destroyed. Did I want [McCoy] to suffer in the same way? Yes."

The trial stems from a lawsuit Bruno filed in November. She alleges McCoy created a hostile work environment by sexually harassing her during the 13 months she worked for him in 2005 and 2006.

The lawsuit also charges the county with failing to provide a safe work environment while she was stalked by Milo Reese, a man convicted of stealing a plane from the Marathon airport in 2001 and crashing it in Cuba.

Bruno, 41, seeks damages, attorney fees and litigation costs from the county. McCoy is not a defendant and has not attended the trial.

A videotape of his deposition was played before the jurors on Monday, the opening day of the civil trial. Attorney Michael Burke, who represents the county, questioned Bruno on why she never told anyone -- not even her husband -- about the alleged sexual harassment while it was occurring.

Burke said that Bruno was aware of Monroe County's sexual harassment policies, which were included in a video she watched during orientation, but did not follow them.

Bruno cried often while telling the jury how her life changed from happy to severely depressed during and after her employment working first for McCoy, and then for County Commissioner Dixie Spehar.

She said she was forced for her mental health to leave her beautiful Key West home and move back to her hometown of Woburn, Mass., where she and her husband are living with her parents due to economics.

Clinical social worker Marilyn Berner testified that she diagnosed Bruno with depression and post traumatic stress syndrome, and that while in Key West she never got better because of the reminders of the trauma.

"She felt trapped and helpless in a situation where she asked [McCoy] to stop and he didn't stop," Berner said. "She felt a lot of helplessness."

Bruno testified that McCoy repeatedly told her six stories about his sexual exploits.

They included a menage a trois in France that resulted in problems with his sexual organ, sexual services with a girl "Dah ling" while on a cultural trip with former George H.W. Bush in China, having sex with prostitutes in Cuba while doing architectural work and having an affair with his neighbor's wife.

Bruno said McCoy "laughed" when she asked him not to repeat the stories.

Burke asked Bruno if McCoy ever provided any "lurid details." She answered no to each story.

"But isn't that bad enough?" she said of the stories that made her feel uncomfortable.

Bruno's last day working for McCoy was March 29, 2006. Burke asked if it was due to one of the sexual stories.

Bruno testified it was over the condescending way McCoy asked her about the meaning of "redundant" in a letter.

The defense called fired Monroe County Attorney John Collins, who testified that McCoy has been "vindictive" dealing with employees who complained about him or did not do as he wished.

After walking out on McCoy, Bruno eventually was transferred to work for Spehar in the same capacity as executive assistant.

During that time, Bruno filed a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which was made public in a newspaper article.

Shortly after that, Bruno said she began to be threatened by Reese with visits from him Nov. 13 and 16.

"I was scared of Mr. Reese," Bruno testified. "He was crazy, someone not taking his medication and fixated on me. I was the target because of complaints I filed against Mayor McCoy."

A trespass warrant was issued against Reese and the county installed a panic button for Bruno. She testified that she was told deputies at the next-door courthouse would immediately come to her rescue if she pushed that panic button.

On Nov. 30, 2007, Reese returned. Bruno testified she pushed the panic button and no deputies came. She ran out of the office. Reese was arrested and sentenced to 21 months in jail.

But Bruno, after consulting with Berner, quit working for Spehar that day.

"I advised her not to return," Berner said, "that it was harmful to her mental health."

The trial is expected to continue through Friday.