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Embattled Appellate Judge Faces Serious Misconduct Suit From Court Assistant

The plaintiff is one of more than a dozen attorneys, court employees and security officers who took action against Justice Jeffrey Johnson after Judicial Performance investigators that Justice Jeffrey Johnson acted inappropriately to them. Johnson remains on the bench.

By **Cheryl Miller** (<https://www.law.com/therecorder/author/profile/Cheryl-Miller/>) | March 11, 2020 at 05:22 PM

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Justice Jeffrey Johnson.

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An appellate judicial assistant on Wednesday sued the state of California and embattled Second District Court of Appeal Justice Jeffrey Johnson for what she described as five years of “unwelcome, inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature” by Johnson.

In a **[complaint \(https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6808265/Velez-Complaint.pdf\)](https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6808265/Velez-Complaint.pdf)** filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court, Trisha Velez said Johnson between 2013 and 2018 subjected her to questions about her sexual history and marriage and allegedly told her, “If I was married to you, I would never leave your bed. I like you, Trish.”

Velez is one of more than a dozen attorneys, court employees and security officers who told Commission on Judicial Performance investigators that Johnson acted inappropriately to them in incidents going back to 2009. Velez is an assistant to Justice Victoria Chaney, who **alleged** (**<https://www.law.com/therecorder/2019/08/07/i-felt-he-wanted-sex-ca-appeals-court-judge-testifies-about-harassment-from-colleague/>**) that Johnson groped her and made unwelcome suggestive comments to her on numerous occasions.

Johnson **has said** (**https://at.law.com/HmfRMP?cmp=share_twitter**) he takes responsibility for some of his actions but also blamed many of the allegations leveled against him on courthouse rumors and stereotypes of African American men. “Johnson deserves the opportunity, as the commission has given others, to prove that reformation and redemption are part of the system of justice in this administration,” his lawyers said last month.

Velez said she did not complain to her supervisors because she feared retaliation. Her lawsuit, alleging sexual harassment and emotional distress, seeks general and special damages from Johnson and the state as well as punitive damages from Johnson.

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Cheryl Miller

Cheryl Miller, based in Sacramento, covers the state legislature and emerging industries, including autonomous vehicles and marijuana. She authors the weekly cannabis newsletter Higher Law (<https://www.law.com/static/briefings/#Higher-Law>). Contact her at cmiller@alm.com

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