

Desiree Leigh Grace Appointed Amid Legal Clash Over U.S. Attorney Post in New Jersey

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A political and legal dispute has emerged over leadership at the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Jersey after a panel of federal judges appointed veteran prosecutor Desiree Leigh Grace to replace Alina Habba, whose interim term expired. The decision comes under a little-used federal statute allowing district judges to fill vacant U.S. Attorney roles when

Senate confirmation stalls or political deadlock prevents permanent appointments.

Grace, a career prosecutor with nearly a decade of experience, previously served as First Assistant U.S. Attorney. Her appointment was seen as a return to stability and continuity within the Department of Justice (DOJ). However, within hours of the judges' decision, the Trump administration reversed the move. Attorney General Pam Bondi removed Grace from the position, calling the judicial appointment an overreach and reaffirming the administration's support for Habba. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche criticized the judges' action as "politically motivated" and a "threat to the rule of law."

The dispute highlights a deeper ideological rift over the role of federal prosecutors and judicial independence. Habba, a close ally of President Donald Trump, gained prominence for pursuing high-profile cases against Democratic officials in New Jersey, including Newark Mayor Ras Baraka and Representative LaMonica McIver. While her supporters see her as a tough and principled enforcer of the law, critics argue that her prosecutions have been politically selective and aggressive in tone.

Grace, by contrast, represents a more conventional DOJ choice, experienced, nonpartisan, and widely respected in legal circles. Her appointment by the judiciary was viewed by many as an effort to restore traditional norms and insulate prosecutorial leadership from political influence.

With Habba's full-term nomination stalled in the U.S. Senate, largely due to opposition from Democratic Senators Cory Booker and Andy Kim, the conflict over who leads the office may intensify. Legal observers suggest

the confrontation could delay key prosecutions and further erode public confidence in the DOJ's impartiality.

This appointment saga reflects broader questions about how U.S. Attorneys should be selected, through politically aligned executive action or based on career qualifications and judicial oversight. For now, the brief appointment of Grace and her rapid removal underscore the tensions between institutional tradition and political loyalty in today's legal landscape.

As the debate continues, the outcome may set a precedent for how future federal vacancies are handled in politically divided environments, particularly in battleground states where legal and political interests often collide.