

Court upholds contempt penalties

Suspended lawyer says she will contest the ruling.

By Bruce Golding
Staff Writer

A state appeals court has upheld \$10,250 in sanctions and fines against a suspended White Plains lawyer who was found in contempt of court and threatened with incarceration if she did not pay up.

The lawyer — Doris L. Sassower, a former president of the New York Women's Bar Association — said she would contest the ruling, which she described as the latest in an ongoing campaign of retaliation for her challenge to the political practice of cross-endorsing judicial candidates.

Her adversary in the contempt case, however, said he was seeking to have Sassower forced to appear in court to pay him the \$10,250.

Lawyer Joel Martin Aurnou of White Plains said he notified the civil division of the county police

that a legal stay of Sassower's contempt order was lifted by a Feb. 14 ruling of the Appellate Division in Brooklyn. A representative of the civil division could not be reached late yesterday.

Aurnou called the Appellate Division ruling "very gratifying." At one point during Sassower's 1992 contempt proceedings, she, her daughter and Aurnou engaged in a five-minute courtroom brawl over possession of certain documents.

Sassower called the ruling "a blatant fraud and a gross travesty of justice." The decision followed another late last year in which the same court reversed a \$9,042 contempt sanction against Sassower in an unrelated case.

"Every one of these fraudulent and dishonest actions will be included as damages in my (pending) federal action," said Sassower, who, with her daughter, Elena Sassower, now runs the not-for-profit Center for Judicial Accountability reform organization out of their Soundview Avenue home.

Once one of Westchester's

"Every one of these fraudulent and dishonest actions will be included as damages in my (pending) federal action."

— Doris L. Sassower

most prominent divorce lawyers, Sassower, 62, has been indefinitely suspended from practice since June 1991 after refusing to comply with a court-ordered medical examination.

Sassower claims the suspension — which she is contesting in U.S. District Court in White Plains — and other rulings against her all stem from her legal challenge of the deal that saw Westchester's Republican and Democratic parties endorse the same seven judicial candidates between 1989 and 1991.

The state's highest court, the Court of Appeals, upheld the practice when it refused to hear Sassower's case in August 1991.

In the latest ruling against her, a five-member Appellate Division panel affirmed state Su-

preme Court Justice Nicholas Colabella's 1992 decision to threaten Sassower with jail time if she failed to pay Aurnou the \$10,250 and sign legal releases on behalf of him and Kathleen Wolstencroft, a former client who sued Sassower for malpractice.

Colabella said he was pleased that the higher court upheld his ruling "because it was procedurally a very complex matter." He declined to comment further, saying the case was still "an ongoing matter."

Sassower contends that Colabella should not have presided over her case because of his friendship — dating to childhood — and former law partnership with Westchester GOP Chairman Anthony J. Colavita Sr.