

Local News

Lawyer asks high court to lift suspension

By Bruce Golding
Staff Writer

A White Plains lawyer suspended from practice for almost four years is challenging the legality of her professional punishment in a lawsuit pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

In legal papers filed with the nation's highest court, Doris L. Sassower contends that her indefinite suspension since June 1991 violates her constitutional rights under the First, Fifth, Sixth and 14th Amendments.

Sassower's petition, which seeks Supreme Court review of the disciplinary proceedings against her, also argues that the suspension is an abuse of power intended to squelch her ongoing work as a "whistle-blower" for judicial reform.

"It seems she hasn't had a fair shake and somebody's got it in for her," said Sassower's attorney, Jeremiah S. Gutman of Manhattan.

In response, state Attorney General Dennis C. Vacco has

asked for dismissal of Sassower's case, arguing that the state Appellate Division "followed clear New York law" in refusing to overturn Sassower's suspension.



Doris L. Sassower

About 7,000 cases are filed with the high court annually, of which between 100 and 120 typically are heard and decided, the spokeswoman said.

Sassower, 62, is a former president of the New York Women's Bar Association and was one of Westchester County's most prominent divorce lawyers. She has been suspended for refusing to undergo a court-ordered com-

petency examination stemming from allegations of professional misconduct.

In her petition, Sassower said the disciplinary proceedings against her were unconstitutional in part because she was given no notice or hearing before their commencement. She also said the entire process was used for "retaliatory purposes" to both "silence and discredit her public

advocacy of reform of New York's judicial process."

In 1990, Sassower filed a legal challenge to the political deal in which Westchester County's Republican and Democratic leaders agreed to endorse the same seven judicial candidates between 1989 and 1991. New York's highest court, the Court of Appeals, refused to hear the case in August 1991, thereby upholding it.