

# WisDems: Jennifer Dorow handed down “unlawful” lenient sentence in OWI case

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**MADISON, Wis.** — New reporting yesterday revealed that Jennifer Dorow allowed a defendant convicted of a fifth OWI offense off easy, contrary to state law.

A Wisconsin Court of Appeals overturned Dorow’s ruling earlier this month, calling the sentence “unlawful” after Dorow imposed probation and nine months of work release despite state law requiring a sentence of one year or more in prison. Dorow later refused a request from prosecutors to reconsider her lenient sentence, raising doubts about Dorow’s ability to make the difficult decisions required of a Supreme Court justice.

**Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: [Bice: Sparks fly in Wisconsin Supreme Court race after Jennifer Dorow’s sentence is overturned as too lenient](#)**

[...]

On Feb. 1, the District 2 Court of Appeals ruled that Waukesha County Circuit Judge Jennifer Dorow took it easy on a defendant convicted of drunken driving for the fifth time.

Dorow, who is currently running as a conservative candidate for the state Supreme Court, sentenced the individual to probation and nine months of work release. But the appellate court said the defendant should have gotten at least one year behind bars and probably the “presumptive mandatory minimum” of 1 1/2 years in prison.

Appeals Court Judge Shelley Grogan, who wrote the decision, called Dorow’s sentence “unlawful.”

[...]

The dispute has to do with the case of Lynne Shirikian, a 50-year-old Delafield resident who was arrested for drunken driving for the fifth time in May 2020. Residents had called Waukesha County authorities to say Shirikian was driving erratically after attempting to steal booze from a local establishment.

Shirikian told officers that she had been drinking wine, vodka and tequila earlier in the day. She had a blood alcohol level of 0.299, nearly four times the legal limit.

Shirikian was charged with felony counts of fifth-offense operating while intoxicated, operating with a prohibited alcohol concentration and bail-jumping. She faced a maximum sentence of 26 years in prison and fines of up to \$60,000.

In February 2021, Shirikian pleaded guilty to one count of fifth-time OWI with the other charges being dropped but read into the record.

At the court hearing, Dorow noted the seriousness of the offense but also noted such mitigating factors as Shirikian's family support, recent treatment and volunteer work. The judge imposed but stayed a sentence of three years in prison and two years of extended supervision.

In the end, Shirikian was placed on three years' probation and nine months of work release. Two months later, prosecutors asked Dorow to reconsider her sentence, but she refused, saying her actions were "valid and in accordance with the court's authority."

The three-member appeals court found otherwise.

In the appellate decision this month, Grogan wrote that fifth- and sixth-time drunken driving convictions have a "presumptive mandatory minimum" of 1 1/2 years in prison.

A circuit judge can instead set the sentence at only one year behind bars, Grogan wrote, but only "if the court finds that the best interests of the community will be served and the public will not be harmed" by the shorter sentence. Those reasons must then be put on the record.

But nothing short of one year in prison is permitted, according to the appellate court ruling.

Grogan wrote that Dorow's ruling let Shirikian off easy.

"Because the circuit court imposed an unlawful sentence that did not comply with the statutes, we reverse the circuit court's order denying the State's motion seeking resentencing," wrote Grogan. "We remand the matter back to the circuit court with directions to resentence Shirikian to a lawful sentence consistent with this opinion."

A new court date has not been set.

Liberals were quick to criticize Dorow's handling of the case. The outcome of the Supreme Court race will determine if liberals or conservatives will control the high court.

Joseph Oslund, spokesman for the state Democratic Party, said it is clear that Dorow "completely misinterpreted state statute" and imposed a light sentence.

"It's disturbing that Jennifer Dorow appears to have botched yet another sentencing decision," Oslund said. "Fortunately, the Court of Appeals was able to step in and ensure justice was done in this case, and that a dangerous individual with five OWI offenses was not let off with a slap on the wrist."