

Timeline of Events:

Late 2018:

- **Property Settlement Dispute:** A Queensland father of two, referred to as "Stradford," appears in court for a routine property settlement dispute.
- **Contempt of Court Charge:** Federal Circuit Court Judge Salvatore Vasta sentences Stradford to 12 months imprisonment for alleged contempt of court, citing failure to provide financial details.
- **Imprisonment:** Stradford spends seven days in prison, alleging he was beaten and abused during this time.
- **Stay of Sentence:** The imprisonment order is stayed pending an appeal.

Early 2019:

- **Appeal Successful:** The Family Court overturns Vasta's sentence, stating that upholding it would be "an affront to justice."

Following Years:

- **Stradford's Lawsuit:** Stradford sues Judge Vasta personally for false imprisonment, claiming trauma from the experience left him unable to work full-time.

August 2023:

- **Landmark Ruling:** Federal Court Justice Michael Wigney denies Judge Vasta judicial immunity, holding him personally liable for falsely imprisoning Stradford.
- **Damages Awarded:** Justice Wigney awards Stradford over \$300,000 in damages, with Vasta ordered to pay exemplary damages for the deprivation of liberty.

September 2023:

- **Second Lawsuit:** Lawyers representing Stradford announce their intention to file a second lawsuit against Vasta for false imprisonment, citing the precedent set by the previous case.
- **Debate Ignited:** Justice Wigney's ruling sparks debate within the legal community regarding judicial accountability, immunity, and the need for reform.

Cast of Characters:

1. "Stradford" (Pseudonym):

- **Bio:** A Queensland father of two who was falsely imprisoned for contempt of court during a property settlement dispute. He successfully sued Judge Vasta for false imprisonment and was awarded damages.

2. Judge Salvatore Vasta:

- **Bio:** At the time of the incident, a Federal Circuit Court Judge who sentenced Stradford to imprisonment for contempt of court. His ruling was later overturned, and he was found

personally liable for false imprisonment by Justice Wigney. He is now facing a second lawsuit for false imprisonment.

3. Justice Michael Wigney:

- **Bio:** Federal Court Justice who presided over Stradford's lawsuit against Judge Vasta. He issued a landmark ruling denying Vasta judicial immunity and holding him personally liable for the false imprisonment of Stradford.

4. Jake Blundell:

- **Bio:** A media law specialist and partner at Banki Haddock Fiora. He believes that the Stradford v Vasta case reinforces public confidence in the judicial system by demonstrating its capacity to address misconduct. He is hesitant about the need for a federal judicial commission, suggesting that existing appeal mechanisms suffice.

5. Dr. Gabrielle Appleby:

- **Bio:** Professor at the University of NSW Law Faculty. She argues that Vasta's actions highlight the need for an independent federal commission to investigate judicial misconduct, citing the Australian Law Reform Commission's recommendations.

6. Luke Murphy:

- **Bio:** President of the Law Council of Australia (LCA). He emphasizes the need for "certainty and consistency" in judicial accountability across Australian courts and tribunals, advocating for the establishment of a federal commission.

7. Australian Law Reform Commission:

- **Bio:** A federal body that recommended the establishment of a federal commission to investigate complaints against judges, citing it as crucial for maintaining public confidence in the judiciary.

8. Australian Bar Association:

- **Bio:** A professional association representing barristers in Australia. They, along with the LCA, are urging swift consideration of legislative reform regarding judicial accountability following the Stradford v Vasta case.

9. Australian Judicial Officers Association:

- **Bio:** A body representing Australian judges and magistrates. They are reportedly reviewing the Stradford v Vasta case to assess potential implications for their members.