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Battaglia Firm Strengthens Influence In Pinellas Courts

ST. PETERSBURG--In a closely-watched case in Florida involving charges of political influence and judicial corruption, Tampa attorney Mark A. Adams has charged that principals in the politically-connected, high-powered law firm of Battaglia, Ross, Dicus and Wein of St. Petersburg have allegedly bragged about the influence they wield in the Florida court system.

That influence just got a whole lot stronger and a lot more visible with Gov. Jeb Bush's recent appointment of firm principal Edwin B. Jagger to a judgeship in the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court of Pinellas and Pasco Counties---the same court system where the Battaglia firm has joined with Judge Crockett Farnell to bring contempt charges against Adams and to file complaints against him with the Florida Bar which could result in Adams' disbarment.

Adams openly admits that he has filed complaints with the Florida's Department of Law Enforcement and federal law enforcement agencies against the Battaglia firm and several judges regarding improper influence and alleged judicial corruption in the Tampa Bay area, supported by documentary evidence.

Adams has also asked Chief Justice Barbara Pariente of the Florida Supreme Court to open an investigation into alleged judicial corruption in the court system.

Jagger, 40, of Seminole, has worked for firm principal Anthony S. Battaglia, a member of the Republican hierarchy, since his graduation from Stetson Law School in 1991. He currently chairs the firm's tax, probate, estate and trust department.

Battaglia was a member of the Republican National Committee for Florida and is a member of the Florida Bar Board of Governors. A former chief assistant U.S. Attorney, Battaglia has also served

as chairman of the federal district courthouse for St. Petersburg and as chairman of the Judicial Nominating Commission of the Sixth Judicial Circuit.

Battaglia was the defense attorney for Republican Congressman Richard Kelly, a former Pasco County Circuit Court judge, in the FBI Abscam sting. Kelly was the only Republican Congressman to be convicted in Abscam.

Battaglia has also represented Straight Inc., now known as the Drug Free America Foundation Inc.. Straight was founded in 1976 by Betty and Mel Sembler, appointed U.S. Ambassador to Italy by President Bush. Battaglia successfully represented Straight when the organization sued the state of Florida giving parents the right to force their children into drug rehabilitation without a court order.

Adams says that Weber and other members or employees of the Battaglia law firm had allegedly boasted that they could influence Sixth Judicial Circuit Court Judge Crockett Farnell in civil litigation in which the Battaglia firm was defending an action brought against Corporate Sports Marketing of Clearwater, their client, by Adams and his client.

Jagger is the son of long-time Pinellas County public defender Robert E. Jagger who is also a principal in the Battaglia law firm. Jagger began his legal career as a summer intern in college for Pinellas County chief judge Susan Schaeffer.

According to the law firm's website, Jagger has managed and built Battaglia into one of the busiest estate planning and probate practices in St. Petersburg, serving over 2,000 of the firm's will and trust clients, as well as providing counsel to many corporations and prominent business persons throughout Pinellas County. Mr. Jagger has been appointed by both private individuals and the courts to serve as personal representative (executor) and/or trustee of many significant estates and trusts.

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