

Top lawyer hired in murder trial

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MIDDLESEX COUNTY: Melanie McGuire, indicted in the murder and dismemberment of her husband whose body was found in three suitcases in Chesapeake Bay in May 2004, has hired a high-profile Manhattan attorney to defend her.

Joseph Tacopina, the attorney for former New York Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik and rapper Foxy Brown, is expected to take over for Madison-based attorney Henry Klingeman in court today along with Newark-based attorney Stephen Turano.

Tacopina is not licensed to practice law in New Jersey. A motion will be made during a status conference in Superior Court, New Brunswick, to allow him to represent McGuire with Turano serving as co-counsel.

Klingeman confirmed the switch in a voice-mail message yesterday but could not be reached afterward.

Turano, Klingeman's former law partner, said last night he and Tacopina will share the workload on the case.

Neither he nor Tacopina would comment on why McGuire decided to replace Klingeman.

Tacopina, dubbed the "Donald Trump" of the New York defense bar by the New York Times, has represented the rapper Brown following charges that she assaulted two Manhattan nail salon workers. He has fielded calls this week for Kerik, whose name sprang up in the news in connection with a construction company with mob ties.

Tacopina won a post-trial acquittal for one of the New York City police officers charged in the Abner Louima torture case. And he represented a co-conspirator in the Michael Jackson child-molestation case.

McGuire retained him and Turano earlier this week, he said.

"I've spent a few days with Melanie, and there's no question in my mind she's innocent," Tacopina said in a telephone interview. "This case has not been accurately portrayed by the media ... I've been very encouraged by the evidence that (shows) Melanie having nothing to do with this."

Her husband, William McGuire, 39, an NJIT computer analyst, disappeared after he and his wife closed on a \$500,000 home in the Asbury section of Franklin Township in Warren County on April 28, 2004. His body was found in and on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia in the couple's matching luggage on May 5, 11 and 16, 2004.

Melanie McGuire, 33, the mother of two young boys and a registered nurse, was indicted on charges of murder, desecration of human remains, weapons offenses and perjury Oct. 12.

She remains at the Middlesex County Adult Correction Center in North Brunswick in lieu of \$2 million bail.

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