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Ford

Podcaster's felony conviction thrown out



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SANDUSKY — Local podcaster Ashli Ford is no longer a convicted felon.

On Tuesday, the Sixth District Court of Appeals announced it accepted the appeal from Ford, 41, of Milan, and [reversed her convictions on felony intimidation charges](#).

The appeals court judges argued that Ford was using protected First Amendment speech when she stated that she would escort Norwalk city officials “to (their) demise in a manner more akin to Malcolm X than Martin Luther King Jr.”

The appeals court additionally stated that Ford’s words did not constitute a “true threat” directed at Mayor Dave Light, law director Stu O’Hara, former police Chief David Smith and former safety services director Mike White.



Bench trial in 2025

In May 2025, Erie County prosecutor Kevin Baxter at trial argued that Ford's words alluded to threats of violence against the men. The prosecution additionally argued the Martin Luther King Jr./Malcolm X comparison related to how the two men were killed; King Jr. was shot once and Malcolm X 21 times.

During trial, the defense's argument centered around their claim that Ford's postings were protected First Amendment speech. They additionally contended she was comparing the political tactics used by the two men, not their assassinations.

At the end of this trial, visiting Lorain County Judge Debra Boros found Ford guilty of four counts of her 19-count indictment. Ford had requested a bench trial — where a judge decides guilt or innocence instead of a 12-person jury.

Appeals court analysis

Appeals court judges Thomas Osowik, Gene Zmuda and Charles Sulek agreed with the defense's argument and that the prosecution did not prove sufficient evidence to warrant a conviction on third-degree felony intimidation charges.

The appeals judges interpreted Ford's words as relating not to physical violence, but to bringing about the officials' "political demise."



They drew a comparison between Ford's post and an old U.S. Supreme Court case — *Watts v. U.S.* — in which the defendant said, "If they ever make me carry a rifle, the first man I want to get in my sights is LBJ," referring to former U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson.



The U.S. Supreme Court found that Watts' remark did not constitute a true threat of harm to the president but was rather a "kind of very crude offensive method of stating political opposition."

"(Ford's) Facebook post, when considering the context in which it was made, is such an example of that type of political hyperbole," the appeals judges wrote. "This court holds that under the circumstances (Ford's post) was not a true threat as a matter of law."

Another trial upcoming

Ford remains under indictment, though, in another felony case that already went to trial in [Erie County once and ended with a hung jury](#).

Ford is currently awaiting a retrial scheduled for Sept. 28 where she faces 13 felony counts, such as tampering with records, forgery, aggravated theft and identity fraud, for allegedly signing a man's name on federal loan documents without permission and falsely claiming a familial relationship in the paperwork.

Ford then allegedly used the funds secured in the loan to dismiss a home foreclosure action and modify the loan.

Most of those charges were brought to trial this past May. After a weeklong trial, the jury announced it was deadlocked and

(Ford).”

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