

## **Ex-Manteca Unified Trustee Ashley Drain Hampton sentenced to 15-month jail term**

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STOCKTON — Former Manteca Unified school board Trustee Ashley Drain Hampton, convicted 17 months ago of election fraud, walked out of a courtroom Tuesday morning and into the arms of her legion of supporters.

“It’s over,” the 30-year-old Hampton said. “It’s over.”

A few minutes earlier, San Joaquin County Judge Charlotte Orcutt had sentenced Hampton to a 15-month jail term as punishment for her convictions on charges of election fraud and welfare fraud. Hampton is eligible to apply for a program that would require her to serve home detention instead.

“The election fraud ... made basically a mockery of our election system,” Orcutt said of Hampton, who was found guilty by a jury of using a false address to get onto the 2014 ballot. “We have full, free elections here, but when our candidates lie to get on the ballot, that’s a problem.”

In determining Hampton’s sentence, Orcutt said she took note that the defendant “lied when she gave her courtroom testimony.”

But Orcutt also said she thought the crimes were “unlikely to reoccur” and added that she was reluctant to separate Hampton from her three young children by taking her into custody. Hampton also previously paid more than \$7,000 in restitution for her welfare-fraud conviction, Orcutt said.

The District Attorney’s Office previously had recommended Hampton serve two years in state prison followed by four years, four months of post-release supervision. Prosecutor Stephen Maier said during Tuesday’s hearing, “I think the court is being very lenient in its sentence.”

Hampton was one of three defendants in the original election-fraud case when it was filed in 2015 by the D.A.'s Office.

Sam Fant, a legitimately elected Manteca Unified board member who helped Hampton get onto the 2014 ballot, agreed to plead no contest to wrap up his case one year ago. Alexander Bronson, like Hampton the user of a false address to win his Manteca Unified election, previously entered a guilty plea to resolve his case.

Hampton and Bronson won their respective 2014 elections and later resigned after brief stints in office. Fant, NAACP President Bobby Bivens and former Stockton Councilman Ralph Lee White were among Hampton's supporters in the courtroom Tuesday morning.

A jury convicted Hampton in April 2017. Afterward, Hampton replaced her previous attorney, hiring Russell Humphrey of Lodi, and her sentencing was delayed for an extended period by numerous motion hearings held in the time since her conviction.

After Tuesday's court hearing, Humphrey said, "I think it's an appropriate sentence. The D.A.'s Office wanted a lot more time. I think the judge did the right thing."



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Hampton said following her sentencing that she plans to appeal the jury's guilty verdict if sufficient grounds can be found by a court-appointed expert in appellate law.

Of the sentence she received, Hampton said Orcutt was "fair for her position and her situation," but declined to expand on the remark.

Later, Hampton added, “The process was not of the highest integrity. ... I am following the process, I’m trusting the process. ... I’m not there yet. We’re just dealing with right here and right now, and right here and right now I am satisfied that it is over.”

She said of Orcutt, “She did surprisingly better than what I expected. ... You just never know with this county. I’m OK. I’m OK. Am I OK with the process? Am I OK with how this county runs? Absolutely not. Not even a little bit.”

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**CORRECTION: Sept. 13, 2018**

**Incorrect information about Hampton’s sentence was included in the print and initial online version of this article and headline. The error has been corrected.**