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Judge Hears Domestic Violence Allegations Against Former Senator Janelle Sarauw; Bench Trial to Continue Friday

Guishard described alleged leash, vehicle, apartment, workplace and third-party contact incidents, while Sarauw denied being the aggressor, said Guishard was abusive and jealous, and testified that Guishard knew about her Delegate campaign plans.

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Ernice Gilbert **June 04, 2026**

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Former senator and Delegate to Congress candidate Janelle Sarauw appears in Florida court during a domestic-violence injunction hearing where sharply conflicting testimony continued Thursday. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — A Broward County judge on Thursday heard hours of sharply conflicting testimony in the final hearing of a domestic-violence injunction case filed against former Virgin Islands senator and current Delegate to Congress candidate Janelle K. Sarauw, with the matter set to continue Friday afternoon and a ruling possible before the end of the day.

The case, Zikeyraw Veretta Guishard v. Janelle Sarauw, is pending in the Circuit Court of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit in and for Broward County, Florida. Guishard is seeking a final injunction for protection against domestic violence. Sarauw denies that Guishard is entitled to that relief and testified Thursday that Guishard, not Sarauw, was the aggressor in the relationship.

Judge Michael G. Kaplan, the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit's designated domestic violence division judge, is presiding.

Editor's note: *The Virgin Islands Consortium recognizes the sensitivity of domestic-violence proceedings and does not identify alleged victims or petitioners as a matter of routine. In this case, however, the respondent is Janelle K. Sarauw, a former Virgin Islands senator and current candidate for Delegate to Congress, and the matter is being heard in a public courtroom involving adult parties named in the court record. The petitioner filed the petition, testified under oath, and provided the allegations at the center of the case. At the same time, the Consortium is withholding the minor child's name and other identifying details, private addresses, intimate images, and unnecessary personal details. The allegations remain contested, no final ruling has been issued, and Sarauw denies that the petitioner is entitled to a final injunction.*

Sarauw served in the Virgin Islands Legislature from July 2017 to January 2023 and is now running for the territory's Delegate to Congress seat in the August 1 Democratic primary. She changed her voter registration to Democrat as she launched her campaign.

The testimony presented two starkly different accounts of the relationship. Guishard described Sarauw as physically abusive, controlling and intimidating, while Sarauw testified that Guishard was jealous, physically aggressive and prone to escalating disputes over Sarauw's communications with other women. Both women described a long and volatile relationship marked by repeated breakups, reconciliations and painful conflict.

Guishard testified that she first met Sarauw in high school, where Sarauw had been her history teacher around 2009. She said they reconnected years later and did not become romantically involved until April 2021, long after she had graduated. Guishard testified that Sarauw moved into her Florida apartment in January 2023 and was later placed on the lease.

The first witness, Deanna Kerr, testified that Sarauw called her in April 2026 and asked her to ask Guishard to drop the restraining-order case. Kerr said Sarauw wanted the matter to "go away" and said the case could place Guishard's nursing license in jeopardy. Kerr also testified that both women had talked to her about getting physical with each other during the relationship, and that Sarauw had described at least one fight as a situation in which she was defending herself.

Tabari Davis, a cousin of Guishard, testified by Zoom that Sarauw accused him of advising Guishard to pursue the restraining order and tried to get him to dissuade her from continuing. Davis said Sarauw discussed possible negative consequences for Guishard and used a Caribbean idiom about digging "a grave for one" and "two," which Davis interpreted as a warning of retribution. Under cross-examination, Davis denied that it was his idea to have the case dropped and denied telling Sarauw he would "dirty" her name.

A minor witness also testified. The Consortium is withholding the child's name and other identifying details because of the witness's age. The minor witness told the court that Sarauw had been part of the family's life for about five years through her relationship with Guishard. The witness described the relationship with Sarauw as "on and off" and testified to seeing Sarauw grab Guishard by the shirt and wrists, push her toward a bedroom door, slam doors and take the family dog from the apartment. The witness said the child had not seen Guishard act violently toward Sarauw in the same way.

The minor witness also testified about a Mother's Day 2025 incident in Sarauw's Jeep. According to the testimony, the witness was seated in the back seat as Sarauw drove at a fast pace after leaving a farmers market. The witness said Guishard told the child to put on a seat belt, while Sarauw told the child not to do so. The witness testified that Sarauw yelled at both the child and Guishard, and that Guishard yelled back that the seat belt was for the child's safety.

Under cross-examination, Sarauw's attorney questioned the minor witness about the prior relationship with Sarauw, including text messages in early 2026 in which the two discussed ordinary subjects, including a Valentine's Day gift. The attorney also asked about a previous dispute after which the minor had apologized.

Guishard then took the stand and described a series of incidents she said formed the basis for the injunction petition.

She testified that on May 19, 2024, an argument led Sarauw to take Guishard's dog, Gucci, downstairs. Guishard said it was the first time Sarauw had taken the dog in that manner, and that she followed because she was concerned about what Sarauw might do with him. According to Guishard, Sarauw put the dog down and appeared to try to make him run away. Guishard testified that as she bent down and came back up to grab the dog, Sarauw struck her across the face with a dog leash, causing her vision to blur. She said she tried to protect her face with her hand, but Sarauw continued hitting her with the leash across her arm, back and abdomen until Guishard was able to get away.

Five photographs from that incident were admitted into evidence. Guishard testified that they showed swelling, redness and bruising around her left eye, a stripe-like mark on her left arm consistent with the size of the leash, redness and what appeared to be a cut near her left ribs, and a whip-like mark extending toward her back. She said she took the photographs the same day but did not seek medical care or call police because such incidents had become "common" in the relationship and she still wanted the relationship to work.

Sarauw later gave a sharply different account of the May 19 incident. She testified that Guishard was angry about Sarauw sleeping on an air mattress, took a knife from the kitchen and stabbed the air bed, nicking Sarauw's eyebrow in the process. Sarauw said Guishard punched her repeatedly, ripped her clothing and sprayed a bleach product toward her face. Sarauw testified that she tried to restrain Guishard and that the confrontation continued for hours. She said the only time she physically fought back was later that night, after Guishard went downstairs and Sarauw followed her.

Guishard also testified about an October 2024 incident that she said began after she questioned Sarauw about communications with another woman. Guishard said Sarauw became aggressive, slammed her against a bed and pulled at her clothes. She testified that she tried to lock herself in a bathroom, but Sarauw banged and kicked at the door and then used a knife to get inside. According to Guishard, Sarauw slammed her onto the bed, ripped her clothes, chased her as she

ran from the apartment, and continued grabbing and hitting her on the buttocks and legs as she scraped herself on the stairs. Photographs of bruises from that incident were admitted into evidence.

Sarauw denied that version. She testified that in a September or October 2024 dispute involving her childhood friend Britney, Guishard ripped Sarauw's shirt, exposing part of her body, and that Sarauw contacted a coworker because she believed she needed to find another apartment. Sarauw said she did not hit Guishard during that incident.

Guishard also described a Carnival-related trip in spring 2025. She testified that Sarauw stopped to speak with a woman Guishard believed was interested in Sarauw, and that Guishard's mood changed. Later, at Carnival Village, Guishard said she saw Sarauw and the woman smiling at each other and confronted Sarauw, who Guishard said cursed at her and called her insecure.

After the two left in Sarauw's Jeep and arrived outside Guishard's mother's home, Guishard said she told Sarauw she was not going anywhere with her. As Guishard was getting out of the Jeep, she testified, Sarauw reversed the vehicle, causing her to nearly fall out, then continued moving the vehicle forward and backward while Guishard was partly out of the car.

Guishard said Sarauw returned the next day before a children's parade and demanded that Guishard get dressed to attend. According to Guishard, Sarauw grabbed her, dragged her into a room, told her to put on clothes, and continued pushing and grabbing her while Guishard yelled for her to stop and leave. Guishard testified that neighbors apparently heard the disturbance and called her mother, and that she eventually locked the door after Sarauw left, though Sarauw remained outside trying to get in. Guishard said she later reconciled because more Carnival events were planned, including a costume Sarauw had paid for, and because she did not want to further upset Sarauw.

Sarauw disputed Guishard's version of the vehicle episode, testifying that Guishard had a habit of exiting moving vehicles and that Sarauw had only been reversing on an incline when Guishard opened the door. Sarauw said she could not have been moving at high speed under those circumstances.

Guishard testified that the Mother's Day incident occurred after she, Sarauw and the minor witness went to church and then to a farmers market. She said the outing was calm until they returned to the Jeep, when Sarauw's mood shifted and her speed increased on I-95. Guishard testified that Sarauw was driving more than 100 miles per hour in a Jeep with large tires, weaving in and out of traffic, and that Guishard feared the vehicle could flip. When Guishard asked Sarauw to slow down, she said Sarauw responded with profanity and told her not to tell her how to drive. Guishard said she then told the child in the back seat to put on a seat belt, but Sarauw repeatedly cursed and told the child not to put it on.

Sarauw denied driving at the speed Guishard alleged. She testified that her Jeep Wrangler Rubicon could not safely travel at 100 miles per hour and said she believed she was driving about 85 mph. Sarauw said Guishard accused her of trying to kill her and the minor, and that the two adults argued in the vehicle, but she denied swerving.

Guishard testified that a December 18, 2025 incident began as she and Sarauw were going to church and the name Britney appeared on Sarauw's car display. Guishard said she asked Sarauw to check her phone, and Sarauw laughed. During church, Guishard said, Sarauw asked whether she was angry about the message, and Guishard told her she was "done." According to Guishard, Sarauw told her she did not get to "dispose" of her, walked out of church, and at one point told

Guishard and the minor that they could take an Uber home. Guishard said she accepted a ride home to avoid making a scene.

Once they returned to the apartment, Guishard said she asked Sarauw not to come upstairs because Sarauw had already moved out. Guishard testified that Sarauw came upstairs anyway, continued arguing about Britney, grabbed, pushed and hit her, then left with the dog. Guishard said Sarauw later returned, took Guishard's purse, wallet and keys so she could not leave, and eventually returned the belongings. Ring-camera screenshots were admitted into evidence, and Guishard testified that they showed Sarauw arguing and pointing at her, leaving with the dog, and later returning with the dog and Guishard's personal belongings.

Sarauw denied that the December church incident turned physical. She testified that Britney was a childhood friend who had texted her about a basketball team, that Guishard became cold after seeing the message, and that the two exchanged words at church but "nothing physical" happened. Sarauw also testified that she still had belongings at the apartment, remained on the lease, received mail there and returned at times to collect personal items and gifts for the minor.

Guishard testified that over the following days she tried to get Sarauw to return the apartment key and remove herself from the lease. She said Sarauw came to the apartment on successive days, including after midnight while Guishard was sleeping. Guishard alleged that Sarauw stood over her, yelled at her, threw a water bottle that did not hit her, and later entered the apartment after Guishard believed Sarauw had returned a key. Guishard said she began to feel unsafe because, even if she changed the locks, Sarauw's name on the lease could allow her to obtain another key through the leasing office.

Guishard also testified that on New Year's Day 2026, while she was working at St. Lucie Medical Center, Sarauw called the nursing station after Guishard had blocked her personal number. Guishard said staff told her "Janelle" was on the phone, and that Sarauw told her to unblock her immediately or she would continue calling the nursing station until Guishard lost her job. Guishard said the call embarrassed and frightened her because coworkers believed it might involve a patient or home emergency, and she later unblocked Sarauw and called from her personal phone to stop the calls from coming into the workplace.

The petition was filed February 5, 2026, the same date Sarauw testified she publicly announced her campaign for Delegate to Congress. Guishard testified that the immediate trigger for filing was an email she received that morning containing a nude video of her. The day before, Guishard said, she had emailed Sarauw that any further communication would be considered harassment. According to Guishard, Sarauw responded that Guishard did not want to "play this dangerous game," and the video followed hours later. Guishard testified that she became scared and went to the courthouse that morning.

Sarauw testified that she sent the video while deleting images of Guishard from her phone. She said she believed Guishard might want it, that she sent it only to Guishard and no one else, and that she no longer has intimate photographs or videos of Guishard on her phone.

Guishard further alleged that, after the temporary injunction was issued, Sarauw attempted to communicate through third parties and that family members and friends pressured her to drop the case or agree to a civil stay-away arrangement. Guishard testified that she was told Sarauw was saying the case could affect Guishard's nursing license and professional standing. Guishard said she eventually filed a police report alleging third-party contact.

Sarauw denied instructing anyone to harass Guishard or pressure her improperly. She testified that mutual friends and relatives were uncomfortable being placed in the middle of the dispute. Sarauw said she was willing to enter into a mutual stay-away order and that, in her view, Guishard was not afraid of her. Sarauw also testified that Guishard was in possession of a firearm, while she was not.

During cross-examination, Sarauw's attorney emphasized that Guishard continued communicating with Sarauw after the alleged incidents, sent apology messages and cards, and at times tried to reconcile. Guishard acknowledged that she did not call police during the relationship, though she said she had thought about it and did not want Sarauw to get in trouble. The defense also introduced messages in which Guishard apologized for "hitting." Guishard described those apologies as either apologies for defending herself or messages sent to keep Sarauw calm.

Guishard also acknowledged that the relationship continued after some of the alleged incidents. On redirect, however, she testified that the relationship had "highs and lows," that she still loved Sarauw in January, and that the fact she tried to reconcile did not mean she was not afraid. She said the February 5 video changed the situation because it came after she had clearly told Sarauw that any further contact would be considered harassment.

After Guishard rested, Sarauw's attorney argued that the petitioner had failed to establish a recent act of violence or a reasonable basis to fear imminent violence. Guishard's attorney countered that the evidence, viewed in the light most favorable to the petitioner, showed multiple incidents of domestic violence, corroborating photographs, text messages, emails, testimony from the minor witness, and alleged third-party contact. Judge Kaplan denied the defense motion, finding that Guishard had established a prima facie case sufficient for the hearing to proceed.

Sarauw then began her own testimony, denying that she was the aggressor. She described Guishard as physically abusive, jealous and prone to escalating arguments over Sarauw's communications with other women. Sarauw testified that in October 2025, after an argument over Sarauw's phone, Guishard punched her, bit her repeatedly and choked her while trying to get the phone. Sarauw said she later bought boxes, packed belongings and left the apartment.

Sarauw said the relationship had become a "roller coaster" of breaking up and reconciling. She testified that she had asked for space in May 2025, that she spent time away in the Virgin Islands, and that after October 2025 she considered the relationship effectively over, though Guishard continued reaching out and the two communicated again in November and December.

Sarauw also testified that Guishard knew about her campaign plans before the petition was filed. She said she had spoken with Guishard about her decision to run for Congress and that Guishard had been privy to campaign-related conversations because they were living in the same home. Sarauw testified that February 5 was the date of her first public campaign announcement, while her formal filing came later.

The hearing ended before Sarauw completed her testimony and before she was cross-examined. Judge Kaplan instructed the parties to return Friday at 1:30 p.m., with proceedings expected to continue until about 3:30 p.m. Sarauw is expected to face cross-examination, and the defense indicated that two additional witnesses remain.