

Manhattan D.A. Hires Ex-Justice Official to Help Lead Trump Inquiry

The official, Matthew Colangelo, also worked on the New York attorney general's investigation of the former president.



By **Jonah E. Bromwich**

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The Manhattan district attorney, Alvin L. Bragg, is hiring a former senior Justice Department official with a history of taking on Donald J. Trump and his family business as the office seeks to ramp up its investigation into the former president.

The official, Matthew Colangelo, who before he became a top official at the Justice Department led the New York attorney general's civil inquiry into Mr. Trump, is likely to become one of the leaders of the district attorney's criminal inquiry into the former president.

The hire marks the latest turn in a long-running investigation that has proceeded in fits and starts in recent years. When Mr. Bragg took office in January, his predecessor, Cyrus R. Vance Jr., had directed prosecutors to begin presenting evidence about Mr. Trump's inflation of his assets to a grand jury.

But Mr. Bragg grew concerned about the strength of the case. In February, when he told the two senior prosecutors leading the investigation, Mark F. Pomerantz and Carey Dunne, that he was not prepared to authorize charges, they resigned, clouding the future of the inquiry.

Mr. Bragg insisted that it was continuing, and in recent months, his prosecutors, led by the office's head of investigations, Susan Hoffinger, have renewed their focus on a hush-money payment to a porn star who said she had an affair with Mr. Trump.

Mr. Colangelo's work in the New York attorney general's office may also be relevant in his new job: Manhattan prosecutors have also scrutinized whether the former president illegally inflated the value of his assets, and the New York attorney general, Letitia James, looked at the same practices. In September, she filed a lawsuit accusing the former president of overvaluing his assets by billions of dollars.

By then, Mr. Colangelo was working at the Department of Justice, having been appointed as acting associate attorney general when President Biden took office. In that job, the third highest-ranking at the department, Mr. Colangelo helped oversee the Civil, Civil Rights, Antitrust and Tax divisions, among others.

He stepped aside when a permanent associate attorney general, Vanita Gupta, was appointed but continued working as her deputy and supervised lawyers in those divisions.

Mr. Colangelo, 48, who also worked in the Obama administration as a senior Labor Department official, will join the district attorney's office as senior counsel. In addition to helping with its "most sensitive and high-profile white-collar investigations," he is expected to focus on housing and tenant protection and labor and worker protection, priorities for Mr. Bragg.

"Matthew Colangelo brings a wealth of economic justice experience combined with complex white-collar investigations, and he has the sound judgment and integrity needed to pursue justice against powerful people and institutions when they abuse their power," Mr. Bragg said in a statement confirming the hire.

The U.S. attorney general, Merrick B. Garland, said in a statement that he had relied on Mr. Colangelo's "wise counsel and excellent judgment" since his first day in the office.

Mr. Bragg and Mr. Colangelo overlapped while working at the New York attorney general's office, where Mr. Bragg rose to become chief deputy attorney general and Mr. Colangelo was chief counsel for federal initiatives. In that role, Mr. Colangelo led dozens of lawsuits against the Trump administration, including a successful challenge to the inclusion of a question about citizenship to the census in 2020. He also oversaw an investigation into Mr. Trump's charity, the Trump Foundation, which caused the organization to dissolve, and led that office's civil inquiry into Mr. Trump's financial practices, which resulted in the September lawsuit.

Mr. Colangelo, who also spent seven years working on housing and employment issues at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, said in a statement that he was "honored to reunite with District Attorney Bragg."

Alvin L. Bragg, left, has sought to jump start the investigation into the former president. Jefferson Siegel for The New York Times

"Expanded enforcement of worker-protection and tenant-protection laws will make our communities safer for all New Yorkers and level the playing field for responsible employers and landlords," Mr. Colangelo's statement said. "And

assisting with the district attorney's focus on financial crimes will promote confidence in the legal system by making clear that the same rules apply to everyone — no matter how powerful.”

He is joining the district attorney's office as prosecutors move to jump-start their investigation into Mr. Trump, which began in 2018 and has already led to the trial of the former president's family business, in which the jury began deliberating on Monday.

While Mr. Colangelo has broad knowledge of the Trump Organization's business practices and extensive litigation experience, he comes to the investigation having spent little time working on white-collar criminal prosecutions. He has never been a line prosecutor or worked as a criminal defense lawyer.

But Tom Perez, the former U.S. secretary of labor, said that Mr. Colangelo, whom he hired twice and who was his chief of staff at the Labor Department, was a quick study.

“Matthew is the perfect person for a job of this sensitivity, because he's unflappable, he's legally brilliant, he has impeccable judgment and he's humble enough to involve people who have been around the block,” Mr. Perez said in an interview.

Mr. Colangelo's time in the Obama administration, his prior litigation against Mr. Trump's administration and his role on Ms. James's inquiry are likely to set off protest from the former president, who has referred to the criminal and civil investigation as a unified “witch hunt.” Some of Ms. James's lawyers have been detailed to the Manhattan district attorney's office to work on the criminal inquiry, and one of them, Gary Fishman, is on the trial team prosecuting the Trump Organization.

Ben Protess and William K. Rashbaum contributed reporting.

Jonah E. Bromwich covers criminal justice in New York, with a focus on the Manhattan district attorney's office, state criminal courts in Manhattan and New York City's jails. More about Jonah E. Bromwich

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