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**By Lisa Rubin, Ken Dilanian, Carol Leonnig and Vaughn Hillyard**

Career federal prosecutors are navigating what colleagues describe as an intense White House pressure campaign to execute Donald Trump's vows of vengeance against his political foes and critics, according to multiple sources familiar with the internal dynamics.

They describe public scoldings and tense discussions playing out in U.S. attorney's offices in Washington, D.C., and Virginia, with prosecutors pursuing probes that political appointees pushed them to launch and finding little evidence of crimes.

In the U.S. attorney's office in Alexandria, the push has roiled prosecutors who fear the goal is to influence the upcoming November elections there, several said.

Fresh from indicting [two of Trump's top political targets](#) in her first three weeks on the job, interim U.S. Attorney Lindsey Halligan this week continued to push prosecutors at her Eastern District of Virginia office to move quickly to charge another politically sensitive case: a Democratic state lawmaker who has been under investigation since the Biden administration, according to three people familiar with the discussions.

MSNBC has not been able to determine the identity of the state lawmaker in question.

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**Career prosecutors worry that Trump political appointees like interim U.S. Attorney Lindsey Halligan are skirting long-standing Justice Department protocols to avoid political interference, sources tell MSNBC.**

Halligan's push for a charging decision on the Democratic lawmaker has rattled prosecutors in her office who believe it could violate the Justice Department's long-standing policy of avoiding overt prosecutorial steps within 60 days of an election when it could potentially influence the results, two of the people said.

The president personally sought to have Halligan placed in her role. And in a Truth Social post last month — one reportedly intended to be a private message — [he urged Attorney General Pam Bondi](#) to expedite prosecutions, saying, "We can't delay any longer, it's killing our reputation and credibility."

The 36-year-old Trump ally has repeatedly pressed her leadership team for updates on the case involving the lawmaker. She asked for a memo by Wednesday of this week on what charges could

reasonably be brought quickly, they said.

Halligan has privately told associates she is simply pressing for progress on cases that appear to have stalled prior to her arrival in mid-September, according to two people. She insists she has not set a deadline to bring the charges before key elections are held in Virginia on Nov. 4, including those for governor, attorney general and the House of Delegates.

Halligan issued a statement to MSNBC without responding to concerns raised by staff in her office.

“EDVA enforces a strict zero-tolerance policy on the unauthorized disclosure of information concerning ongoing investigations or cases,” she said in a statement. “Such leaks will be investigated to the maximum extent permitted by law.”

A White House spokesperson on Thursday referred questions to the Department of Justice.

“Attorney General Bondi and Deputy Attorney General Blanche have assembled an outstanding team of US attorneys who are trusted and empowered to diligently uphold the rule of law, prosecute crime, and protect our communities,” Justice Department spokesman Chad Gilmartin said in a statement. “While we do not confirm the existence of, nor comment on, specific investigations outside of our public filings, any Department employee who leaks deliberative or investigative developments only jeopardizes the integrity of investigations and the incredible work of federal law enforcement.”

But Halligan’s push for action against the Democratic state lawmaker is part of a far broader and multipronged campaign by the White House and Trump political appointees to use the Department of Justice to bring politically charged criminal cases, according to multiple people directly involved or briefed on the handling of the cases. All were granted anonymity to speak freely about sensitive internal deliberations they were not authorized to discuss.



Career prosecutors felt that Trump and his loyalists are using them to advance a retribution campaign against the president’s perceived enemies, multiple sources told MSNBC. The tactics have spurred awkward and tense conflicts in a half dozen U.S. attorney’s offices in several states, the people said.

In some cases, the sources said, the career prosecutors have methodically walked through the steps of grand jury investigations they’ve been ordered to launch — but often have delayed reporting back their conclusions. They’ve sought to protect their line attorneys and hold on to their own jobs while bracing to inform political bosses they lack the factual basis to seek criminal charges against people the president has personally and publicly marked for retaliation.

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On Sept. 24, a day before [Halligan single-handedly asked a grand jury](#) in Alexandria, Virginia, to indict former FBI Director James Comey, Jeanine Pirro, the U.S. attorney for the District of

Columbia, dressed down a top supervisor, according to three people with knowledge of the meeting.

Pirro scolded the longtime criminal prosecutor, Jon Hooks, in front of fellow supervisors. She asked why he couldn't deliver charges or actions on cases she and the White House considered to be a high priority, but which prosecutors view as lacking sufficient evidence of a crime, according to one of the people.



Some of the politically sensitive cases run out of Pirro's office include allegations that Biden administration officials illegally awarded [\\$20 billion in green energy grants](#), that D.C. police illegally misreported crime statistics to undercount violent crimes, and that George Soros' philanthropic foundation funds violent protests and domestic terrorism.

Pirro's office referred questions from MSNBC to the Justice Department.

It was widely reported that Hooks, the head of the office's fraud and public corruption unit, resigned his position, but details of his departure are more complicated than previously known. The night after his confrontation with Pirro, Hooks gave notice that he would resign from the U.S. attorney's office by the end of October, intending to stay on long enough to help hand off the reins and key cases to his replacement. But instead, days later, a Pirro deputy notified Hooks at a farewell party for fellow prosecutors in the D.C. office that he was being fired immediately, the people said.

Career prosecutors in the office, already deeply disturbed by Pirro's pressure to pursue what they considered specious cases in order to please the president, viewed the firing of Hooks as gratuitously punitive.

Kelly O. Hayes, a career prosecutor serving as Trump's acting U.S. attorney in Maryland, has been facing intense pressure and questions for weeks from Ed Martin, a Trump ally tapped to run the [newly formed](#) weaponization task force at the department, about when she will bring criminal charges against Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif.

She has chosen to move forward with a case she feels has merit and that will also be welcomed by the White House: to prosecute Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton on charges related to mishandling classified information. Hayes has told colleagues she believes some charges against Bolton are reasonable and warranted, a case involving mishandling of classified information that began under the Biden administration, according to MSNBC sources.

But Hayes' office has been interviewing witnesses in a grand jury probe examining allegations that Schiff defrauded a bank related to financing for a second home in Maryland and is bracing for being fired herself when she explains that there are insufficient facts to bring such a case against the U.S. senator, the sources said.

In another U.S. attorney's office, in the Western District of Virginia based in Charlottesville, prosecutors are fearful of notifying Trump's appointed leader of the office that they see no evidence to charge any members of former FBI Director Chris Wray's leadership team with destroying documents, two people said. The investigation, opened by the Western District because an FBI document storage handling facility is based there, has so far not found any intentional effort to destroy FBI evidence or documentation, but rather routine destruction of duplicate copies of records as part of the FBI's standard practice of securing sensitive information.

Trump's first choice to lead the Western District, former Virginia GOP legislator Todd Gilbert, resigned in August after only a few weeks in the post; a long-standing career prosecutor and former supervisor in that office, Zachary Lee, resigned late last week. Lee declined to comment when reached by MSNBC.



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