

Jennifer Dulos case: Flamboyant ‘high-wire act’ the norm for Pattis

By Lisa Backus



Fotis Dulos’ defense attorney Norm Pattis

Attorney Norm Pattis lost his bid Friday to give his client, Fotis Dulos, a shot at reviving a relationship with the woman he’s been dating for about three years.

Not long after a Superior Court judge upheld the no-contact order between Fotis Dulos and co-defendant Michelle Troconis, each charged with tampering with evidence and hindering prosecution in the disappearance of Jennifer Dulos, Pattis was filing another

motion.

This time it was in family court, requesting a judge to suspend the two-year contentious divorce case between Fotis and Jennifer Dulos because the 50-year-old mother of five remains missing.

Earlier in the week, Pattis publicly indicated he was looking at a “revenge suicide” theory as an explanation for Jennifer Dulos’ disappearance.

That came a few days after Pattis claimed Jennifer Dulos staged her own disappearance to frame his client.

On Thursday, Pattis implored the state to drop the charges against Troconis so she would be free to tell prosecutors the alibi she had for his client.

Pattis’ flamboyant style and bombastic allegations regarding the victim, whose disappearance has sparked a five-week, two-state search involving hundreds of police man hours, have given some defense attorneys and domestic violence advocates pause.

“He’s floating theories out there and he’s making comments on evidence and he knows the government can’t respond,” Westport attorney Elliot Warren said. “That’s his style. He’ll be broadcasting his client’s innocence right up until the last minute.”

But New Canaan Attorney Matthew Maddox pointed out that Pattis is simply pulling together a vigorous

defense, which nowadays, includes playing directly to social media rather than letting the court record speak for itself.

“It’s nearly 2020,” Maddox said. “I think some attorneys understand that there is no real distinction any longer between traditional reporting and what’s happening on social media. Everything is happening simultaneously. We now live in a social media-commandeered environment.”

Pattis declined to comment for this article. He handles “high-profile civil rights advocacy, high-stakes criminal defense and high-conflict civil and custody trials,” according to his website. He is also representing Infowars host Alex Jones who is being sued for repeatedly calling the 2012 Sandy Hook shootings that killed 26 a hoax.

Since Jennifer Dulos was reported missing May 24, the case has taken more twists and turns than an Ann Rule true crime novel. Fotis Dulos told a real estate broker two days after his estranged wife disappeared that he hoped she was found safe. By that point, New Canaan police had already seized his phone and were obtaining cell tower locations they say indicate where he was on the day she went missing.

New Canaan police responding to the missing person report found what appeared to be blood stains in her garage and determined that Jennifer Dulos had been a victim of a “serious physical assault,” arrest warrants said.

Her car was found a few miles away at Waveny Park, which was searched along with the home she previously shared with Fotis Dulos in Farmington, a home owned by her family in New York, two ponds in Avon, tons of garbage at a Hartford trash plant and properties associated with her estranged husband’s real estate development company, Fore Group.

At least three of his attorneys quit before Fotis Dulos hired Pattis on June 8. He’s now representing Fotis Dulos in the criminal and divorce cases.

By the time Pattis came on board, Fotis Dulos and Troconis had already been arraigned. The charges stem from police tracing their cellphones to Albany Avenue in Hartford where they say video captured Fotis Dulos dumping garbage bags containing his wife’s blood.

Since his hiring, Pattis has publicly floated theories about the case to the media, including appearances on TV and radio shows. Pattis told WPLR radio personalities Chaz and AJ that the housekeeper obviously didn’t see a “gory” crime scene when she arrived at Jennifer Dulos’ home at noon on May 24. He also said during a guest spot on their show that the phone records obtained by police start at 1:30 p.m. and his client was on an international call that morning.

More recently, he proclaimed that Troconis will provide an alibi for Fotis Dulos for the day of the disappearance — but only if the

charges against her are dropped.

He’s also filed a flurry of motions and was nearly sanctioned by the court for releasing details of a sealed psychiatric report done on the family as part of the divorce case to determine custody.

Last weekend, Pattis said Jennifer Dulos, an accomplished writer, once wrote a 500-page manuscript similar to the 2012 best-selling thriller novel, “Gone Girl.” Pattis claimed Jennifer Dulos could have used her creativity to script her own disappearance and frame her estranged husband.

The theory was sharply criticized and refuted by Jennifer Dulos’ family. A family spokeswoman said Jennifer Dulos’ manuscript was nothing like the “Gone Girl” novel and Pattis’ “attacks and ludicrous” theories are hurting the Dulos children.

Pattis’ attempt at getting his client and Troconis back together with a motion seeking clarification on the no-contact order was swiftly denounced by her attorney Andrew Bowman, who filed a companion motion asking the judge to uphold the ban.

By releasing certain case facts, Pattis is spinning the narrative on how his client should be perceived by the public — who one day could be potential jurors or potential clients, attorneys said.

“He’s a fairly skilled lawyer, but he’s got an agenda,” Warren said. “He’s playing to the next person who is

charged.”

He’s also playing to the jury and the public, Maddox said.

“The penalty our clients suffer from in their reputations in the media coverage is far worse than the criminal penalties,” Maddox said. “Norm has a very good grasp of this. There is an urgency to provide context and color to the media and the blogosphere. It’s a type of advocacy for your client. Norm thrives in this type of circumstance. He also has a command of the rules and procedures of the court and of the law.”

The case is being watched closely by advocates for victims of domestic violence who are concerned about the tenor of Pattis’ attacks on Jennifer Dulos.

“Based on the details of the transcripts from the family court, it is evident that Jennifer Dulos is a victim of domestic violence,” said Karen Jarmoc, executive director of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

She views Pattis’ comments as a form of manipulation and harassment that advocates and victims routinely experience during court proceedings.

“We know abusers, and in some cases their representation, utilize a series of tactics in both family and civil court to demonize victims as a mechanism to not hold offenders accountable,” Jarmoc said.

Pattis is walking a tightrope between playing fast and loose with

the facts, which could turn people off, while trying to sway public opinion in his client’s favor, Maddox said.

“It’s a bit of a hair-raising high-wire act to balance between advocacy for your client and the risk of overstating or mistaking facts in the case,” Maddox said. “People don’t forget. But Norm is pretty adept at it.” ■