Summary: Robert B. Johnston, Jr. v. County of Gila, et al.

In **Robert B. Johnston, Jr. v. County of Gila, et al. (No. CV-26-00491-PHX-DWL)**, a former legal secretary filed a federal lawsuit against Gila County and elected County Attorney Bradley Beauchamp alleging wrongful termination and violations of his First Amendment rights.

1. Background and the Conflict

Robert Johnston Jr. worked as a legal secretary in the Payson branch of the Gila County Attorney's Office (GCAO). On September 10, 2025, following the assassination of Turning Point USA leader Charlie Kirk, Johnston used his personal cellphone during a bathroom break to post "Rot in Hell Charlie Kirk" on his private, "friends only" Facebook page. ***Five days later, Gila County Attorney Bradley Beauchamp terminated Johnston's employment immediately, citing workplace disharmony*** concerns.

2. The Legal Battle Over Retaliation

Johnston appealed his termination to the Gila County Personnel Commission (GCPC). Following his appeal, the GCAO issued an amended termination notice that ***added*** severe allegations of **sexual harassment against him**. Johnston's attorney successfully got the sexual harassment claims tossed after exposing ***crude courtroom behavior by GCAO prosecutors*, which forced Deputy County Attorney Joseph Collins to admit to making inappropriate bets during questioning. While the county subsequently *abandoned the fabricated sexual harassment allegations*, the GCPC ultimately upheld the firing based solely on the Facebook post, failing to address Johnston's First Amendment arguments.

3. The Federal Lawsuit Framework

Johnston filed a federal First Amendment lawsuit asserting that he had a property right to his job under the Gila County Merit System and possessed an exemplary,

discipline-free record prior to the incident. He alleges that Beauchamp fabricated the sexual harassment claims to fast-track his termination in direct retaliation for exercising protected political free speech on his private time.

** The "crude courtroom behavior" references a highly unusual and inappropriate **cash bet made between GCAO prosecutors** during a formal criminal trial.

During an administrative hearing over Robert Johnston's firing, his defense attorney cross-examined GCAO Chief Deputy County Attorney Joseph Collins. Under questioning, Collins admitted to the following behavior:

- **The $100 Slang Bet:** Collins admitted that another prosecutor bet him $100 that he would not use the slang word **"hoo-ha"** during his formal closing arguments to the court.
- **The Courtroom Execution:** The underlying criminal case involved a female defendant who had concealed contraband in her anatomy. Collins accepted the bet and deliberately repeated the phrase *"she had drugs in her hoo-ha"* on the record during his closing arguments to win the $100 cash prize.