

Trump to Be Sentenced for New York Hush-Money Conviction

Judge has said he doesn't intend to order a prison term

By Corinne Ramey
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[Donald Trump](#) is set to be sentenced Friday for covering up hush money paid to a porn star, forcing him to revisit his [felony conviction](#) just days before he returns to the White House.

The unprecedented court hearing is largely a formality. The presiding judge, Juan Merchan, has indicated that he doesn't intend to order a prison term and rather will sentence the president-elect to an unconditional discharge, which carries no punishment at all.

The proceeding begins at 9:30 a.m. in state court in Manhattan. It is expected to last under an hour, with Trump appearing virtually on a video feed. Prosecutors from the Manhattan district attorney's office and lawyers for Trump will likely speak during the proceeding. Defendants are typically given a chance to speak in court before a sentence is handed down. Merchan will also likely address Trump and speak about his crimes.

"Sentencing has always been a very moralistic event," said John Coffee Jr., a Columbia Law School professor. "It is a verbal tongue lashing."

In an unusual move, Merchan said he would allow audio of the sentencing hearing to become public after the proceeding.

An unconditional discharge is a rare sentence for someone convicted at trial of even a low-level felony, lawyers said. Merchan must recognize the impracticality of probation officers searching the White House or ordering a sitting president to do community service, said Effie Blassberger, a former state prosecutor who isn't involved with the case.

"This is someone who is going to take office in 10 days, and you can't ignore that fact," Blassberger added. "There is no other sentence the judge could have given him."

Trump in 2023 was indicted on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records for covering up hush money paid to adult-film actress Stormy Daniels. She had alleged a sexual encounter with Trump, which he denied.

During a trial last spring, Manhattan prosecutors argued that then-candidate Trump conspired to influence the 2016 election by buying up negative stories about him that could hurt his candidacy. Trump's lawyers denied he did anything illegal, and said seeking to sway voters was allowed under the law. In the court hallway, Trump railed against the prosecutors and the judge, saying they sought to hurt him politically.

Jurors found Trump guilty of all 34 counts he faced. The conviction carried no mandatory prison term, although such a sentence was among the options available to Merchan.

Trump has said he plans to appeal the verdict. That process begins after sentencing.

In a surprise ruling last week, Merchan ordered Trump to appear for sentencing before his Jan. 20 inauguration. The ruling kicked off a week of last-minute legal maneuvering by Trump's legal team, who asked an intermediate New York appeals court, the state's highest court and the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the proceeding.

The Supreme Court on Thursday evening [declined to put the sentencing on hold](#), saying the burden on Trump was insubstantial and that issues around evidence could be addressed on appeal.