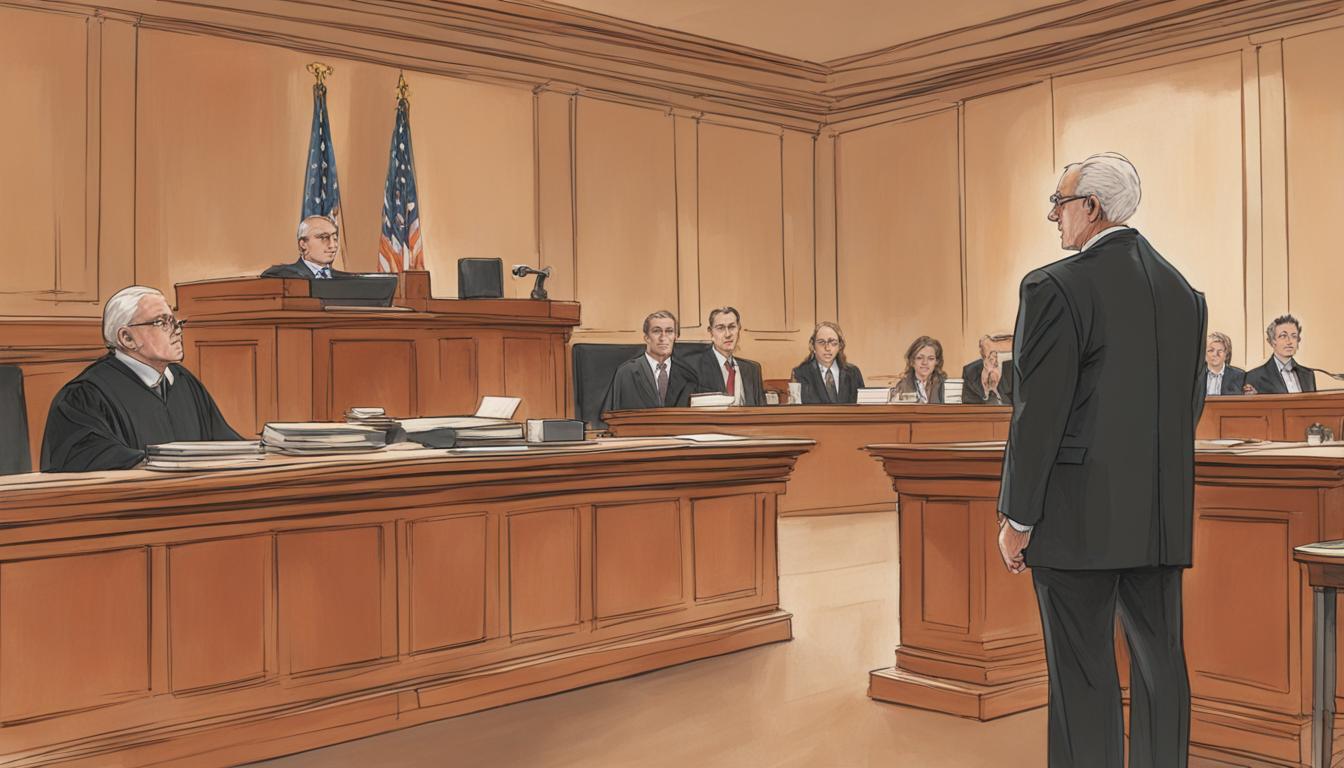
# Trump Hush Money Trial Sees Escalated Tensions with Defense Witness



**Trump Hush Money Trial Sees Escalated Tensions with Defense Witness**

On Monday, May 20, 2024, Judge Juan Merchan cleared the courtroom during Donald Trump’s hush money trial after a heated exchange with defense witness Robert Costello. Costello, a former federal prosecutor, was admonished for his behavior, which included making comments under his breath and rolling his eyes, according to court transcripts. Judge Merchan threatened to remove Costello from the stand, labeling his conduct as “contemptuous.”

Costello’s testimony is aimed at discrediting Michael Cohen, Trump’s former attorney. Cohen testified that Trump directed him to pay $130,000 to adult film actress Stormy Daniels to keep her story of an alleged affair from surfacing during the 2016 presidential election. Cohen admitted to coordinating and financing the payment shortly before the election.

Judge Merchan’s rebuke came after Costello’s comments during his testimony prompted the judge to suspend proceedings briefly and remove reporters from the courtroom. Upon their return, Costello continued his testimony, which is set to resume on Tuesday.

The defense argues that the case should not proceed to the jury, contending that prosecutors have not proven their case. Prosecutors accused Trump of falsifying business records to hide the payments as legal expenses, claiming they were part of an effort to protect his campaign from damaging revelations.

Judge Merchan has yet to rule on the defense's request to dismiss the charges. Closing arguments are expected to take place the Tuesday after Memorial Day, with the trial now in its concluding phases.