

State backs employees in Oceanside harassment case

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Daniel Faust, Douglas Hernandez and Jacqueline Urli at a news conference in February detailed their case against Hempstead Sanitary District No. 7.

Photo Credit: Howard Schnapp



New York State has found probable cause to believe that an Oceanside sanitation district discriminated against three employees who alleged a commissioner sexually harassed one of them and the district board fired the others for supporting her.

The New York State Division of Human Rights released the findings in August and September following investigations into the staffers' complaints against Hempstead Town's Sanitary District No. 7, an independent municipal agency that collects trash in Oceanside, state records show.

Frederick Brewington, the employees' attorney, said his clients are now preparing to file suit in federal court against the district and its commissioners for alleged violations of federal and state employment and civil rights law. He declined to say what damages or remedies his clients may seek.

Brewington praised the outcome of the state probes.

"What is disturbing about these events is not just the continuing harassment that our clients have had to endure, but the complicity of the other Commissioners, who were aware of the behavior of one of their own, but did nothing to stop it," he said in a statement.

District commissioners did not respond to a request for comment.

In her complaint, Jacqueline Urli, a secretary in the district, said commissioners created a "hostile, toxic" work environment in which sexual harassment went unchecked.

Urli alleged that Commissioner Matthew S. Horowitz, in particular, displayed "revolting, creepy and disturbing" behavior toward her beginning in August 2018, including unwanted touching, suggesting that they "have a three-way" with another district employee and commenting on her appearance, according to the complaint.

The state report on Urli's complaint says the "respondents vehemently deny these allegations."

Urli, who still works for the district, filed a written complaint in November 2018 to Daniel Faust, then the district's general supervisor, who presented the complaint to the board, Faust said earlier this year.

Around nine days later, the board fired Faust and district treasurer Douglas Hernandez at a public meeting without explanation, Faust and Hernandez said earlier this year. Both had offered to serve as witnesses to Urli's allegations, they said. They each had worked for the district for more than 20 years.

Urli said the commissioners also took away some of her duties after she filed her complaint, which she described as retaliatory.

Her complaint accused the respondents of discrimination, sexual harassment, creating a hostile work environment and retaliatory employment practices under the state Human Rights Law and the U.S. Civil Rights Act.