

Racism alleged at Nassau public works

Employee says county favors white neighborhoods over black for services

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A Nassau public works employee who received a promotion, transfer, and \$150,000 to settle a discrimination claim against the county in 2003 now charges that he has been the target of racial slurs and discrimination in his new job.

In his latest complaint to the state Division of Human Rights, Willie Warren also alleges that racism is so pervasive within the public works department that the county systematically favors white communities over black neighborhoods in providing services, such as street cleaning and snow plowing.

The county denies any discrimination, against Warren or against black communities.

Specifically, Warren, who is African-American, contends that Nassau crews clear snow from South Franklin Avenue in the minority area of Hempstead only after they've plowed streets in the predominantly white communities of Long Beach, East Rockaway, Island Park and Rockville Centre.

"They take the best equipment and more personnel and go over to the south and take care of that first," Warren said Monday during an interview in the office of his lawyer, Fred Brewington. "They worry about the minority areas last."

Warren contends that seven white men with less experience have been promoted over him since he was transferred to the county's Hempstead garage and promoted from equipment operator I to equipment operator III as part of his settlement.

Warren alleges his former supervisor, Doug Cucci, harassed him, used racial slurs, and told him specifically, "Don't worry about the north side. The south side comes first."

Cucci died several months ago, officials said.

"The claim is outrageous," stated Public Works Commissioner Peter Gerbasi. "South Franklin Avenue is a major north-south through-street that has priority status and is often plowed before most other streets."

Gerbasi said he did not understand Warren's list of promoted employees, saying most had not been promoted. Gerbasi said several recent promotions had gone to minorities.

"We have taken action at DPW to make sure that promotions are granted based solely on performance, regardless of race or politics," Gerbasi said.