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Ex-agency chief says firing unjust

BY NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON

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The recently ousted head of the Nassau County Commission on Human Rights filed a wrongful termination claim against the county yesterday, asserting that her firing was motivated by politics, racism and sexism.

Renaire Frierson, a Republican hired in 2001, was flanked by county and community leaders yesterday who praised her work and called for her reinstatement.

Commissioners voted 8 to 4 to remove her Monday night, pointing to poor staff oversight among other issues. One commissioner abstained, another was absent and one position is vacant.

"I feel that I was terminated because Mr. Suozzi does not want me," Frierson said, referring to Democratic County Executive Thomas Suozzi. "His incentive is to get rid of me and to put somebody he wants in there."

Frierson's attorney, Frederick Brewington, said that his client made 20 requests for staffing and support over the last two years, but all were denied — a deliberate attempt, Frierson said, to make her look incompetent.

"It was sort of like cutting off my leg and then blaming me for being cripple," she said.

A spokesman for Suozzi said that the hiring and firing of Frierson was the sole decision of the 15-member commission.

The Rev. Allan Ramirez, chairman of the commission, said the decision was based on a county audit of the commission, which is charged with investigating discrimination claims and promoting diversity through education.

County Comptroller Howard Weitzman reported in January that oversight of the commission's office staff was inefficient and that between 2004 and 2006 most employees were paid for days not worked. Weitzman also faulted Frierson for submitting time sheets for county work when she was teaching at Nas-



NEWSDAY PHOTO / KAREN WILES STABILE

Renaire Frierson filed a wrongful termination claim yesterday.

sau Community College.

"The commission, for months, has been studying, discussing and reflecting on the recent audit and also discussed her leadership and it came to a decision," Ramirez said. "Sooner or later people have to accept the reality of what happened."

Frierson's claim, which is against Suozzi, the commission and commissioners, was filed with the county attorney and the commission.

Nassau County Legis. Roger Corbin (D-Westbury) and Kevan Abrahams (D-Hempstead) were joined by several ministers who called for Frierson's rehiring in the \$99,279-a-year post.

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"We are not going to stand for it," Corbin said. "I'd like for Kevan and myself to walk Ms. Frierson back to her office Monday morning."

A rally is scheduled for noon Monday in front of Suozzi's office.