

Oceanside Sanitation District worker, 2 former employees file \$35M suit alleging sexual harassment, retaliation



Daniel Faust, Douglas Hernandez and Jacqueline Urli, seen last year, have filed a federal lawsuit against the Oceanside Sanitation District. Credit: Howard Schnapp

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An Oceanside Sanitation District worker and two former employees filed a federal lawsuit seeking more than \$35 million from the sanitation district and the five commissioners alleging sexual harassment and retaliation for reporting it.

Board secretary Jacqueline Urli and former employees Daniel Faust and Douglas Hernandez filed the suit Friday in U.S. Eastern District Court against the Hempstead Sanitary District No. 7, a special district that provides trash pickup in Oceanside, and the five board members.

Commissioner chairman Austin Graff and the district declined to comment Friday, saying they had not yet been served with the lawsuit.

The lawsuit follows a claim filed against the district last year and a ruling by the state Division of Human Rights in October that found probable cause that the district discriminated against employees who complained Urli was sexually harassed by former Commissioner Matthew Horowitz. Horowitz resigned from the board last month.

The lawsuit seeks “in excess of \$5 million” plus attorney fees, for each of the seven complaints including violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 14th Amendment, retaliation, failure to intervene and conspiracy.

“We’re seeking to vindicate their civil rights,” said Hempstead-based attorney Frederick K. Brewington, who is representing Urli, Faust and Hernandez. “We allege a determination by decision makers that made this a pattern of abuse leveled against those employees who dared to speak up against this behavior.”

Urli was the only female employee at the district when she was hired in 2013. She said the sexual harassment began in 2018 when Horowitz began making inappropriate remarks, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit cites incidents, including Horowitz accusing Urli of being unfaithful to her husband, telling co-workers she was having an affair with him, and suggesting “a three-way” with other commissioners.

Urli said she left a board meeting “shaking and crying” when the board was discussing a sexual harassment policy. She said Horowitz had been stroking her arm the week before while installing computer software.

Urli submitted a formal complaint of retaliation, gender discrimination and a hostile work environment in November 2018, chronicling about two months of sexual harassment allegations. The lawsuit states that Graff had circulated an email denying her claims.

The board terminated Faust and Hernandez nine days after Urli submitted her complaint and named them as witnesses. Urli said she was not allowed to attend special meetings until January to take minutes of the sanitation commission. She said she had other duties diminished and was forced to work extra hours under the threat of termination and intimidation.

“There is a level of accountability, not only for these wrongful actions, but to those who failed prevent this behavior,” Brewington said.

