

The Oregonian

Portland Police Sergeant Files Notice to Sue the City Alleging Discrimination

*By Tom Hallman
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A Portland police sergeant who last year received a city award recognizing her fight against sexism now intends to sue the city alleging discrimination and retaliation, according to a tort claim.

Liani Reyna alleges in the notice that she continues to “experience an on-going pattern and practice severe and pervasive discrimination.”

The claim lists nearly four pages of alleged incidents, the most recent in December when Reyna said she was notified she didn’t pass the lieutenant’s test. Reyna said the denial of the promotion was due to her reporting and multiple complaints of discrimination.

Oregon law requires a claim notice before someone can file a lawsuit against a public agency.

Reyna in 1999 was the first woman and openly gay member to join the Portland Police Bureau’s Special Emergency Reaction Team. Her selection caused acrimony because she was picked over two men who ranked higher than her on eligibility tests. She resigned from the team in November 2000.

Reyna reported inappropriate and sexually degrading initiation rites by the team in a complaint that led to discipline in 2002 against 20 current or former members of the team. Reyna said her complaint caused her to be passed up for promotions, shunned by fellow officers and exposed to complaints from colleagues.

Reyna eventually was promoted to sergeant in October 2005 and most recently has led and developed the bureau’s Emergency Management Unit.

She and others were disciplined for actions during a fatal police shooting of Aaron Campbell, an unarmed black man, in January 2010.

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Bully-Proof?

*By Alex Zielinski
March 28, 2019*

City employees harassed because of their employer can now ask city attorneys for legal protection.

In January, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly was chased and filmed through downtown Portland by a so-called “citizen journalist,” who shouted conspiracy theories at Eudaly as she walked six blocks to a meeting. It wasn’t the first time Eudaly had been publicly harrassed by this specific man—but she wanted it to be the last. Afterward, she met with the city attorney’s office to learn what legal actions she could take to protect herself.

“[I learned] that I would have to use my own time and financial resources to obtain a stalking order against someone, because of what my job is,” Eudaly explained at a recent city council meeting.

That’s no longer the case.

On March 20, city commissioners passed an ordinance allowing city attorneys to represent city employees—police officers, elected officials, and bureau staff—who are seeking stalking or restraining orders after having been threatened or harassed because of their job.

“We are increasingly seeing situations in which [people] are experiencing hostile, harassing, and even threatening behavior directed at them because of their role as city officials and employees,” City Attorney Tracy Reeve told commissioners before the vote.

The city attorney’s office already represents city employees in cases directly related to city business—maybe someone got in a crash while driving a city vehicle, or a cop gets sued for shooting someone—but it doesn’t address personal threats.

Yet those personal threats have begun to take a public toll. From racist emails clogging Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty’s inbox to threats of violence sent to Mayor Ted Wheeler via Instagram, elected officials have faced a rising tide of harassment from hostile members of the public.

“This behavior by a handful of people has limited the way I interact with the public,” said Eudaly at the March council meeting. “It makes me feel isolated and less connected to the community I am supposed to be representing.”

Such harassment hasn’t only impeded elected officials. City staff say they avoid lingering in City Hall corridors on days when council is in session, afraid that a particularly indignant visitor will take out their anger on anyone wearing a city employee badge. One member of Commissioner Nick Fish’s staff had to independently file a restraining order against a member of the public.

“I want to be able to assure my staff that it is not a safety risk to show up to the office,” said Hardesty at the meeting.

There’s no clear line between the legal protection that’s granted to the city’s few elected officials and Portland’s 10,000 non-elected employees. City Attorney Reeve said that distinction can become more apparent in court, when a judge considers the “reasonableness” of someone’s fears.

“Say you’re an elected official and someone is yelling at you during a city council meeting,” Reeve explained. “A judge may say that’s part of the job you signed up for.” But if, for instance, you’re out walking your dog and someone is harassing you about a city issue, a judge might take your concerns more seriously.

Having public dollars to support city employees’ cases, however, won’t make it any easier to obtain a stalking order or protective order. As with any victim of stalking or abuse in Oregon, the burden of proof is the victim’s responsibility. According to one city staffer, that means we won’t be seeing any immediate litigation against frequent harassers.

At least, the staffer added, “not yet.”