

Whistleblower sues city, police chiefs

Written by By Gallup Sun Staff
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Finds herself on a path to nowhere

A Gallup police officer's attorney has filed a lawsuit with the 11th Judicial District Court, claiming the city, the former police chief, and the current police chief violated the state's Whistleblower

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Protection Act.

The complaint, which was filed with the clerk of the court Jan. 30, is based on the mistreatment of Rosanne Morrissette while on the job.

This would not be the first time Lt. Rosanne Morrissette has filed a lawsuit against the city and her superiors. Court documents, filed by her Albuquerque-based attorney Thomas Grover, show that over the last three years Morrissette has been targeted by GPD's top brass in an ongoing campaign to get her fired.

The complaint lists those involved as former police chief Philip Hart, and current police chief Franklin Boyd.

Before her problems began with Hart, and Boyd, Morrissette was in a position of power within the police department, supervising squads of officers and detectives.

In April 2016, she was the first woman promoted to the position of lieutenant. It seemed like her career was on the fast track for further advancement within the department.

But within a month, her momentum came to a sudden stop when Morrissette had a falling out with Boyd, over the processing of vehicles of arrested subjects.

The lawsuit states, "Defendant Boyd closed in on Ms. Morrissette in an arm's reach distance, yelled profanity at her, and another GPD officer had to intervene in an effort to calm Boyd down."

Not long after that Morrissette also reportedly objected to Hart's directive for "GPD personnel" to secretly record the private conversations of city employees, including those of City Manager MaryAnne Ustick and City Attorney Curtis Hayes.

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Instead of heeding her concerns, the suit states Hart and Boyd allegedly retaliated against her.

“Defendants retaliated against and harmed Ms. Morrissette with various economic, liquid and emotional distress injuries in violation of the New Mexico Whistleblower Protection Act,” the complaint reads.

Up to that point, Grover explained, Morrissette had an impeccable record with the department and was now under attack “with unsupported internal affairs investigations as cover to ultimately terminate Ms. Morrissette’s employment with GPD.”

Responsibilities were pulled from her one by one. The first to go was her role as the department’s public information officer. Morrissette was suspended, then subsequently terminated in June 2018.

A few months later, however, she was successful at getting her job with the department back, with back pay.

Since returning, she has been placed in a position working as a liaison with downtown businesses. Grover said his client is being sidelined by her employer. She describes her current job status as being “locked in a closet” and she wants to be let out. Her office, located in downtown Gallup, reportedly has no windows and is some miles away from GPD headquarters.

The complaint states that Morrissette is no longer in a supervisory position and has no path to advancement.

Grover says he sees all of this as punishment for being a whistleblower.

“For cops that want to do cop work, it’s like hell,” he said.

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Grover says that his client's hope is to be restored to her former position and responsibility.

"In some ways she would like to see her police career rehabilitated," he said. "For a police officer, it's a really horrible environment to put them in."

Grover says that a suit like this would normally take a couple of years to wind its way through the system. But he believes this case should take far less time, considering the evidence that has already been gathered.

Morrisette is asking for monetary, as well as punitive damages. Grover said a dollar amount has yet to be determined.

GPD Capt. Erin Toadlena-Pablo said the department has no immediate comment to make about the lawsuit.

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