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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sitka Police Department Settles

Sexual Harassment Lawsuit with Sex Crimes Detective

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The City of Sitka has agreed to settle a lawsuit with former police officer and Sex Crimes Detective Mary Ferguson. After suffering sexual harassment by her training officer, then Sgt. Walt Smith, she notified her supervisors. This led to a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). An internal investigation resulted, which her supervisors both mischaracterized and then attempted to bury. In October of 2018, while still employed with The Sitka Police Department, she filed a lawsuit against The City of Sitka, The Police Department, Lt. Walt Smith, Lt. Lance Ewers, Chief Jeff Ankerfelt, and City Administrator Keith Brady. Her lawsuit detailed allegations of violations of the State of Alaska's Human Rights Act; Violation of Title VII of the Federal Civil Right Act; Breach of The Implied Covenant of Good Faith and Fair Dealing; Violation of Alaska's Whistleblower Act; and other harms.

Det. Ferguson also reached out *The Forensic Criminology Institute* (FCI) for assistance with the examination of mounting evidence in her case, seeking an impartial forensic assessment. This because of our experience with both these type of crimes and rights violations; and because of our experience conducting assessments of law enforcement agencies with respect to these specific contexts.

On October 31, 2018, the Forensic Criminology Institute prepared a Memo for the Sitka Assembly regarding her EEOC complaint. In specific, it recommended a criminal investigation of her allegations, specifying statutes that were relevant; an administrative assessment, separate and independent from those named in the allegations; and the release of a complete copy of a related "Workplace Investigation" report prepared at the request of City Administrator Keith Brady by Attorney Kimberly K. Gearity of Washington

State - to both the City Assembly and Det. Ferguson. The findings of that report had been re-imagined and ultimately falsified by Admn Brady to the Assembly. Subsequent to the Investigation and public reporting of this case to The Sitka Assembly by the FCI, both the police supervisor involved (Lt. Walt Smith) and the Chief of Police (Jeff Ankerfelt) have resigned. Additionally, The City Administrator, Keith Brady, was fired.

In January of 2019, Forensic Examiners Brent E. Turvey, PhD and Aurelio Coronado, PhD, submitted a report to The City Assembly on Det. Ferguson's behalf. It detailed the extent of the crimes committed against her, supported by the City's own internal investigation; the extent to which The Sitka Police Department acted with malice and negligence against Det. Ferguson; and their defiance of both their own policies and the laws that govern them. It further detailed her continued harassment at the department, and the subsequent absence of consequences for those involved despite clear findings of responsibility.

The settlement agreement, signed by former Detective Ferguson on August 3, 2020, awards her \$515,000 — inclusive of legal costs — and the right to conduct her own external investigation of the Sitka Police Department within certain limiting parameters. It also allows the City of Sitka, and its police officers to avoid having to go under oath in what would be an embarrassing public trial. This is the third lawsuit from members of the Police Department settled by The City of Sitka within a year.

Links:

Officer Mary Ferguson v. City of Sitka et al.

<https://www.forensic-institute.com/ferguson>

Forensic Criminology Institute (FCI) / Behavioral Sciences Lab

<https://www.forensic-institute.com/bsl>

Former Sitka officer wins harassment settlement, promises investigation of police
by Katherine Rose, KCAW | August 18, 2020