

Monroe-Woodbury officials slapped with 2 more lawsuits

CENTRAL VALLEY — Two new federal lawsuits have been brought against Monroe-Woodbury school officials, accusing them of creating a "hostile work environment" for female administrators and punishing a former colleague for his criticism.



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By CHRIS MCKENNA

Posted Jan. 28, 2010 at 2:00 AM

CENTRAL VALLEY — Two new federal lawsuits have been brought against Monroe-Woodbury school officials, accusing them of creating a "hostile work environment" for female administrators and punishing a former colleague for his criticism.

The gender-discrimination charges were made by Carole O'Neill, an assistant superintendent who says she was routinely treated in a demeaning manner, then ostracized after a filing a complaint last year with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The First Amendment case was filed by James Rathbun, a former administrator who accuses district leaders of trying to embarrass and silence him with their remarks in a recent report by the state comptroller's office.

Both suits are filed in White Plains and seek unspecified amounts in damages.

Each names as defendants Superintendent Joseph DiLorenzo; Edward Mehrhof, the assistant superintendent for human resources; and school board President Michael DiGeronimo.

Brian S. Sokoloff, the Long Island attorney representing them in the O'Neill case, blasted the accusations on Wednesday as baseless smears.

"Lawsuits are won by evidence in front of juries, not in press releases and pleadings," he said.

DiLorenzo and DiGeronimo declined to discuss the cases, but denied the allegations and said the district will vigorously defend itself.

brought her own gender-discrimination case last year, arguing that she was dismissed from her job at Pine T Elementary because of an animus against women.

In a litany of alleged offenses, O'Neill claims DiLorenzo dubbed her his "bagel girl," screamed at her in front of male co-workers and avoided discussing school matters with her. Mehrhof, she charges, hugged and kissed female subordinates and interrupted meetings by fanning himself and saying, "Stop, stop, stop. I'm having a hot flash."

She also complains the district hired a less experienced, male administrator with a salary \$10,000 higher than hers.

Rathbun is suing over a December report in which state auditors criticized his hiring as deplorable

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superintendent in 2007 — a finding that the district endorsed with what Rathbun argues were "false and misleading statements."

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