

Bergen acts to settle suit alleging sex harassment

Will pay \$455,000 to ex-drug counselor

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Bergen County has agreed to pay \$455,000 to settle a lawsuit filed by a former employee who claimed she was the victim of sexual harassment and discrimination in her former job as a drug and alcohol counselor.

The freeholders voted 4-0 on May 27, with three freeholders absent, to approve the settlement with Shea Stevens of Saddle River to resolve the lawsuit she brought in 2011 in Superior Court in Hackensack.

The settlement was reached just before the case was scheduled to go to trial on Monday. Under the terms of the settlement, the county will pay \$267,500 to Stevens and \$187,500 to Smith & Schneiderman, the Morristown law firm that represented her.

"I think it was a fair result," Stevens' attorney Andrew B. Smith, said Friday. He declined further comment.

A spokeswoman for County Executive Jazmin Tedesco could not be reached for comment. The case began several years before she took office in January.

Stevens was hired in April 2010 as a full-time substance-abuse counselor with the county's Addiction Recovery Program with an annual salary of \$48,010, according to county officials. She was dismissed from the county in July 2011.

Her lawsuit claimed that her dismissal was related to a sexual harassment complaint she filed against a co-worker in the unit.

Lawsuit: Settled

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She said he also showed co-workers inappropriate pictures on his computer and made off-color and offensive jokes.

The co-worker eventually was transferred to another department and was dismissed, according to court motions filed by her lawyer. Stevens said she complained to supervisors about the situation, but that her complaints did not lead to any disciplinary actions.

She claimed her dismissal came in retaliation for her complaints. Attorneys for the county argued that the record showed only one written complaint brought by Stevens, in January 2011.

They argued in court motions that her dismissal had nothing to do with the complaint. Rather, they said it had to do with her lack of an Alcohol and Drug Counselor certificate, a requirement for permanent appointment to the position.

Stevens also alleged that she was the victim of sexual harassment and discrimination. The county settled that lawsuit with a payment of \$195,000 to her estate.

Ordered certificates

County attorneys said that when

former County Executive Kathleen Donovan took office in January 2011, she ordered that all counselors working for the county have those certificates, as required by Civil Service rules.

That resulted in Stevens and two other co-workers being terminated from their jobs. But Stevens and one of those co-workers were offered full time jobs elsewhere in county government, county attorneys said.

They say that Stevens was offered a job as a receptionist in the Department of Human Services, but that she turned that position down.

The settlement comes nearly a year after county officials settled a related lawsuit filed by Joanne Miller, a former neighbor and supervisor of Stevens' who died in 2012. She was also represented by Smith.

Miller also alleged that she was the victim of sexual harassment and discrimination. The county settled that lawsuit with a payment of \$195,000 to her estate.