

# Seattle, police sued; ex-cop alleges sex harassment

By Ian Ith  
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A former Seattle policewoman has filed a discrimination lawsuit against the Seattle Police Department, alleging that her supervisors sexually harassed her and the people who were supposed to investigate the matter launched a campaign to discredit her and force her out of the ranks.

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The Police Department deferred comment to the City Attorney's Office, which denied a cover-up, saying a lengthy investigation resulted in three officers being recommended for discipline.

Former Officer Heather Hottle filed the suit Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Seattle. Her attorney, Scott Blankenship, said Hottle is seeking punitive damages and asking a federal judge to order changes in the department's sexual-harassment policies.

"Police officers who oppose sexual harassment should not be treated like criminals," Blankenship said. "She's trying to send a message that those with the courage to come forward should not be victimized."

Named as defendants are the city and the department as a whole; Janice Corbin, the department's former human-resources director; Terri MacMillan, a police sergeant in charge of equal-employment opportunities; Sgt. Eddie Rivera; and officers Michael Goetz and Miguel Torres.

Hottle resigned in December 2000 by sending a five-page letter outlining her allegations to Chief Gil Kerlikowske and then-Mayor Paul Schell.

Assistant City Attorney Paul Olsen said yesterday that the department has pursued the matter extensively, and he denied wrongdoing by Corbin and MacMillan.

Olsen said internal investigators have recommended Rivera, Goetz and Torres for discipline related to Hottle's complaints, though the outcomes of their cases haven't been completed. The department declined to disclose what the disciplinary recommendations are because the cases are being appealed, and the dispositions haven't been decided, Olsen said.

Neither the officers nor leaders of the Seattle Police Officers Guild could be reached to comment on the suit or the officers' discipline.

The department agrees Hottle was sexually harassed but denies that department leaders, including MacMillan and Corbin, ignored it or retaliated against Hottle.

"This isn't going to be a situation where the city is saying it's all in Ms. Hottle's imagination," Olsen said. "There was some basis for some of the complaints. (The department) has treated these allegations seriously from the very beginning."

But Hottle, 33, and her attorney say any discipline will be too little, too late.

"Obviously, it wasn't effective," Blankenship said. "The other guys are still employed, and she's not."

Hottle, a former Army counterintelligence agent who graduated at the top of her police-academy class and was named Officer of the Month in May 2000, alleges that the harassment started about August 2000, shortly after she spurned aggressive advances from Rivera, who was then her acting lieutenant in the department's South Precinct.

In the letter to the chief, released yesterday by Hottle's attorney as part of the official court complaint, Hottle says that an organized effort to run her out of the department shattered her pride in the uniform she'd worn since 1997.

Hottle alleges that Rivera made physical advances which were humiliating and amounted to assault and battery. When she rejected him and began dating a civilian, Rivera and Goetz, in uniform, broke into the boat she lived aboard to look for him, she alleges.



Hottle says Rivera twice called her into his office and threatened to have her fired.

She says Goetz and Torres, who at times served as acting sergeants over her, joined in harassing her to protect Rivera.

When she complained to MacMillan in the equal-employment office, Hottle alleges, MacMillan was hostile and belittled her, suggested she might be "another Anita Hill" and threatened to take away her badge and gun. Hottle alleges MacMillan repeatedly went to her home to question her, once showing up at her boat to "determine my 'fitness for duty.'"

Hottle also alleges that Corbin, who has since left the department, showed up at South Precinct roll calls in August 2000 and announced to everyone that Hottle was accusing certain officers in the precinct of

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sexual harassment. Corbin suggested that other officers would be sued "and lose their homes" if they didn't keep quiet, Hottle alleges.

"The manner in which my complaint was handled has been humiliating and stressful for me and made it very difficult for me to continue working in this department," Hottle wrote to the chief. "I am saddened by the retaliatory way the Seattle Police Department treats employees who attempt to come forward and voice a complaint."

Assistant City Attorney Olsen said Corbin and MacMillan didn't do what Hottle alleges.

Hottle has moved to Arizona and is working on a master's degree to become a teacher, Blankenship said.

"Basically, she's afraid to go back to the law-enforcement world because of what she went through," Blankenship said. "It took all her enthusiasm away. She was pretty frightened, and she was pretty riled by this."

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