

Justice Department Seeks to Intervene in Lawsuit Alleging Race Discrimination and Retaliation by Pocomoke City, Maryland, the Worcester County Sheriff and the State Of Maryland

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U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

The Justice Department announced today that it has moved to intervene in *Savage et al. v. Pocomoke City et al.*, a private lawsuit alleging race discrimination and retaliation under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by Pocomoke City, Maryland, the Worcester County Sheriff and the state of Maryland. Title VII is a federal statute that prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of the basis of sex, race, color, national origin and religion.

The United States' complaint in intervention alleges that the Worcester County Sheriff and the state of Maryland subjected former Pocomoke City Police Officer Franklin Savage to a racially-hostile work environment while he was assigned to a joint task force operated by the sheriff's office. Specifically, Officer Savage was repeatedly subjected to racial epithets as well as other racially-charged acts of harassment, humiliation and intimidation by his co-workers and supervisors. Officer Savage's complaints about racial harassment allegedly resulted in a series of retaliatory actions against him by the Worcester County Sheriff's Office and Pocomoke City, concluding with the termination of his employment. The complaint further alleges that Pocomoke City similarly retaliated against two other officers - former Pocomoke City Police Chief Kelvin Sewell and former Pocomoke City Police Lieutenant Lynell Green - for supporting Officer Savage in the course of his complaints. Chief Sewell was eventually terminated as well.

The complaint seeks a court order that requires the defendants to implement policies and procedures that will ensure a workplace environment free of discrimination and retaliatory conduct. The United States also seeks relief, including monetary relief for the three charging parties as compensation for damages caused by the alleged discrimination.

"Federal law protects against discrimination and retaliation in the workplace," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta, head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "In police departments, that protection is vital not only for individual officials, but also for the communities they serve. The Justice Department is firmly committed to ensuring that our nation's state and local law enforcement agencies comply with Title VII's promise of a workplace free from racial discrimination and retaliation."

Officer Savage, Chief Sewell and Lieutenant Green each filed charges of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC's Baltimore Office investigated the charges and made reasonable cause findings. After unsuccessful conciliation efforts, the EEOC referred the charges to the Justice Department.

"No one should have to face harassment and retaliation while at work," said EEOC Chair Jenny R. Yang. "When public employees face discrimination, it undermines the trust and credibility in our public institutions. This case represents the latest partnership between EEOC and the Department of Justice to advance our shared Title VII enforcement responsibilities."

This lawsuit was brought as a result of a joint collaborative effort by the EEOC and the Civil Rights Division to vigorously enforce Title VII.

"EEOC is committed to ensuring the employees who serve the public in critical law enforcement positions are protected by the laws forbidding unlawful harassment and retaliation in the workplace," said Director Spencer H. Lewis Jr. of EEOC's Philadelphia District Office, which includes the Baltimore Field Office. "I am pleased that EEOC and the Department of Justice have established a collaborative relationship that will impact public employers and work together to redress violations of the law when they occur."

Enforcement of federal employment discrimination laws remains a top priority of the Justice Department. More information about Title VII and other federal employment laws is available on the Civil Rights Division's website at www.justice.gov/crt. The EEOC enforces federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination. Further information about the EEOC is available on its website at www.eeoc.gov.

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