

New suit says Outlaw let son harass women

By Gilbert D. Martinez
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Just as the county thought it was done with sex harassment lawsuits when it settled a case for \$550,000 last week, a similar lawsuit landed in its lap.

This time, D. Gayle Loftis — the Hackensack lawyer who brought the sex harassment suit against the county and sheriff's officials on behalf of seven women — filed a federal civil lawsuit against the county, Superintendent of Elections Betty Outlaw and her 24-year-old son, Kassiem Outlaw, who works in her office as a voter machine mechanic.



BETTY OUTLAW

The lawsuit was filed Thursday, the same day the county agreed to pay out \$550,000, one of the biggest such settlements in state history, to a sheriff's officer to settle her claims of being sexually harassed by an undersheriff.

The new lawsuit contends Kassiem Outlaw harassed Barbara James, who worked as a confidential aide to the elections superintendent, by making "repeated offensive physical contact . . . multiple, offensive references to various aspects of (James') anatomy . . . (and) threats to cause harm to (James) in some sexual fashion . . ."

It also alleges that another employee, Frances Farley, suffered retaliation when she reported the son's wrongdoing to Betty Outlaw.

Betty Outlaw denied the charges.

"Obviously, someone has an ax to grind, and it's with me," she said. "It's lowdown and dirty to include someone's child out of a grudge or something else."

Outlaw said her son rarely comes in contact with the women or anyone who

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works inside her office, as he usually works at the Jersey City warehouse where the voting machines are kept.

The lawsuit alleges Kassiem Outlaw also repeatedly asked James for an intimate relationship and made unannounced calls and visits to her home, and alleges the unwanted attention happened for some time before and leading up to the 1995 Christmas holidays.

The lawsuit says that Farley saw Kassiem Outlaw threaten to stab James in the breast with a letter opener, and that when Farley reported the incident to Outlaw, the elections chief took no action and said James "deserved everything she got."

Farley also charges that after she reported the abuse, Betty Outlaw retaliated against her by fostering a hostile workplace, such as having all of her calls transferred directly to Outlaw's phone so the superintendent could monitor who was calling Farley.

James and Farley declined to comment further and referred questions to Loftis.

James resigned from the elections office in April 1996 and Farley was transferred to work as a civilian employee in the Sheriff's Department a few weeks ago.

The lawsuit further states that Outlaw condoned her son's actions and failed to set up a discrimination policy in her office, and that Outlaw and the county violated the Americans With Disabilities Act when Outlaw didn't

keep Farley in a clerical job.

Outlaw says Barbara James never spoke to her about any alleged abuse involving her son.

"My son never bothered with anyone," she said, adding, "(Farley) is not a credible person in my view."

Kassiem Outlaw could not be reached for comment.

Betty Outlaw was appointed by Gov. Jim Florio in 1991 and served as acting superintendent until being officially installed in December 1992, when her five-year term began.

Since that time, she has hired two of her sons — including Kassiem — and the mother of her grandson and given temporary work to two of her daughters.

Those hiring practices were examples of blatant nepotism, critics have charged, even though Outlaw can hire and fire at will in her office.

The lawsuit involving the Outlaws was filed on the same day the county agreed to pay \$550,000 to Hudson County Sheriff's Office Rose Frank to settle a sex harassment case against the county, Undersheriff Martin Budinick and former Sheriff Edward J. Webster.

Frank was the last of seven women remaining in the 4-year-old federal civil lawsuit, which has cost the county \$1.7 million in settlements, fees for three private attorneys representing Budinick, Webster and former Chief Warrant Office Edmond Monti, and investigator fees.