

Telegraph Forum.

LOCAL

In new lawsuit, former Galion police chief alleges racism led to his dismissal

Kimberly Gasuras Special to Bucyrus Telegraph-Forum

Published 5:35 a.m. ET April 26, 2024 | Updated 5:35 a.m. ET April 26, 2024

A former Galion Police chief filed a lawsuit against the city, along with Mayor Tom O’Leary, in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio Eastern Division alleging discrimination and racism.

Marc Rodriguez has been embroiled in legal battles with the city and O’Leary since he was terminated from his position on Dec. 19, 2022, after he was accused of sexually harassing a dispatcher on the police force, a charge he has always vehemently denied.

Rodriguez, who was named Galion police chief in May 2021, was placed on paid administrative leave in August 2022, before his termination in December 2022.

According to documents previously provided by the Galion city administration, pre-disciplinary conferences were held Nov. 4 and Dec. 9, 2022, in which Rodriguez was found guilty of several charges of misconduct. The seven counts are labeled as failure of good behavior.

Rodriguez has denied the allegations and filed a lawsuit in Crawford County Common Pleas Court against the city, which was dismissed in August 2023.

The new lawsuit was filed after an appeal was granted. The case is ongoing along with the new lawsuit.

Rodriguez is represented by Galion attorney E. Roberta Wade in the lawsuit that was filed with the District Court.

The lawsuit alleges Rodriguez, who is of Mexican decent, was unfairly terminated from his position after an employee, who had recently been disciplined for good cause, made allegations against him that were not justified. It is also stated Rodriguez was employed by the city for 22 years and had an exemplary record.

The lawsuit alleges the sexual harassment allegations by the former police dispatcher were used by O’Leary to terminate Rodriguez because of his Mexican heritage and states O’Leary is a known racist who has expressed anger toward Mexicans.

The lawsuit’s claims for relief states O’Leary unlawfully discriminated against Rodriguez because of his race and aided and abetted others in doing the same.

Response from City of Galion

Matt Echelberry, communications director for the City of Galion, released the following statement in response to the lawsuit:

"We deny the allegations in the complaint. Our lawyers are going to vigorously defend this. We note the same allegations were made to the EEOC, which decided not to pursue the claim after Galion provided information on why Mr. Rodriguez was terminated. A police chief should lead by example in his treatment of women. In our opinion, the false and inflammatory allegations made against the Mayor (O’Leary) only highlight the lack of merit of the claim and were designed 1) for the press to write inflammatory stories without having all the facts and 2) to deflect from Mr. Rodriguez's conduct which led to his termination."

Echelberry added, “at the advice of our lawyers, we will not further comment on this.”