

Sexual Harassment Lawsuit Against Federal Court Officials Enters Mediation Process



A lawsuit accusing federal court officials of mishandling sexual harassment complaints has taken a new direction, heading towards mediation rather than proceeding to its scheduled trial next month. The lawsuit revolves around the case of Caryn Strickland, a former North Carolina public defender, who claimed her complaints of sexual harassment were not appropriately addressed by federal court officials.

The ex-public defender, Caryn Strickland, along with lawyers from the U.S. Department of Justice representing the judiciary, filed a court document on Tuesday stating their mutual agreement to heed the advice of U.S. District Judge William Young. The judge recommended initiating further settlement discussions through mediation, an alternative to the impending trial.

U.S. District Judge William Young, although not initially assigned to the North Carolina lawsuit, was entrusted with the case due to conflict reasons. He suggested U.S. Magistrate Judge Marianne Bowler, based in Boston, as the mediator to facilitate the resolution talks. Both parties concurred with this proposal, as outlined in the filing on Tuesday.

The filing indicated that both sides have committed to participating in an in-person mediation session within the next 45 days in Boston, under the guidance of Judge Marianne Bowler. This decision to mediate will lead to the cancellation of the non-jury trial scheduled for September 5th in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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The origins of the lawsuit trace back to 2020 when Caryn Strickland's claims of experiencing sexual harassment at the hands of a superior gained traction. Furthermore, she alleged that her attempts to have the judiciary address her grievances were met with resistance. Strickland was associated with the Federal Public Defender's Office situated in the Western District of North Carolina, an integral part of the judiciary system.

Strickland's testimony before Congress last year echoed the voices of other women who disclosed harassment and discrimination within the federal judiciary workforce. A notable point highlighted during her testimony was the lack of workplace sexual harassment protection under Title VII within the federal judiciary domain.

In response, the defense countered the allegations by asserting that both the Federal Public Defender's Office and the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals promptly and effectively dealt with Strickland's complaint. They further disputed the veracity of her claims regarding sexual harassment.

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During a hearing held on July 27th, representatives from both sides informed Judge Young that prior attempts at reaching a settlement had been unfruitful. However, this new agreement to engage in mediation indicates a renewed effort to find a resolution outside the courtroom.

The lawsuit, symbolic of the broader issue of workplace sexual harassment within the federal judiciary, has garnered significant attention. With the upcoming mediation session, there is a possibility that the parties involved could come to a mutually agreeable settlement, potentially putting an end to the protracted legal battle.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.