

Harassment ruling affects local case

BY JOSH FUNK
Senior Reporter

As news of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling outlawing same-sex sexual harassment reverberated throughout the country, its effects also were felt by one Lincoln man.

A former male employee of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Lincoln has filed suit against his male supervisor for harassment, including sexual harassment.

In his complaint, Jose Lovato-Littlefish alleged he endured prolonged racial and physical harassment from the man who was supposed to be training him.

Racial slurs and unwelcome touching were a regular part of Lovato-Littlefish's work throughout 1995, he said in a complaint filed in October with the U.S. District Court.

But until the Supreme Court announced its decision, Lovato-Littlefish said "he did not understand the touching abuse coming from a man."

The harassment didn't go unreported, he said, but management still refused to act.

"(My boss) was supposed to be terminated if he continued, but the bosses didn't follow through," Lovato-Littlefish said.

Instead, the offending manager received little more than a verbal warning from superiors, Lovato-Littlefish said.

Despite filing all the reports he could and pursuing every option, Lovato-Littlefish was told he still must complete training with the man who was allegedly

harassing him.

Bound by his economic situation and the need to support his family, Lovato-Littlefish stayed at the VA for nearly a year before the harassment became too much for him to handle, he said.

It was only after one of his complaints reached the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that Lovato-Littlefish considered filing a lawsuit.

After following all the necessary channels, the EEOC ruled his complaints were valid, prompting Lovato-Littlefish to go to Federal Court.

Without a lawyer, Lovato-Littlefish has filed several complaints in court, but they are still in preliminary stages.

It remains unclear what will happen to the suit. This week Magistrate Judge David Piester denied Lovato-Littlefish's request for a court-appointed lawyer, and the VA moved to dismiss the case because of a lack of jurisdiction.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln law experts said people need to be aware of their actions in the office and communicate clearly to avoid harassment.

"It is important to think about the impact before you act," UNL Affirmative Action Director Linda Crump said.

Something as simple as a bouquet of flowers or an off-color joke can be considered harassment, she said.

In one such case at UNL, a man gave his female employee flowers to reward her for a job well done, but she interpreted it as a sexual advance, Crump said.

"If someone is using their power to force something, it is abusive."

LINDA CRUMP
UNL affirmative action director

Better communication could have eliminated the problem before it started, Crump said.

Supervisors must be especially careful. The power they hold changes the rules of behavior, Crump said.

"Their behavior has a different impact on employees, so bosses have a higher responsibility."

As people are promoted they don't always understand this change in behavior, Crump said.

Most harassment is subtle and hard to prove, but that does not make it right, Crump said. Even though people may not have intended to offend, they can be held responsible.

"The law looks at the impact of the harassment as well as the intent," she said.

But regardless of the offense, harassment is wrong, Crump said.

"If someone is using their power to force something, it is abusive."

Weekend tourney causes police to up traffic enforcement

BY JOSH FUNK
Senior Reporter

As 48 teams dribbled their way toward six different state championships last weekend, Lincoln Police made sure they didn't dribble all over the roads.

The number of fender benders and drunken driving incidents increase dramatically when thousands of fans come to town for the state basketball tournaments, Lincoln Police Sgt. Dave Harnly said.

So this year, police set up a special traffic enforcement project to curb the problems.

"We want to make people aware of the problem and get them to drive defensively," Harnly said.

Fifteen officers were stationed around the Bob Devaney Sports Center on Friday and Saturday nights to help alleviate traffic problems.

Problems are identified by looking at statistics from previous years, Harnly said.

With increased police presence, officers also can help visitors find their way around town, Harnly said.

Visitors from out of town staying with college students also can cause problems, Harnly said, so police also keep an eye on the campuses.

The state tournament also meant extra duty for University Police, who were responsible for security at games, University Police Sgt. Mylo Bushing said.

Officers were stationed inside the Devaney Center to make sure there were no fights and to report any accidents, Bushing said.


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