

A driver's murder exposes bus company's racial discrimination, lawsuit says

Lawsuit: After an aggrieved bus driver murdered another in October, a black supervisor complained about disparate treatment and was harassed by her bosses

SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA, USA, July 18, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- It was a horrific crime: a recently terminated Victor Valley Transit Authority bus driver murdered an ex co-worker and an innocent bystander, then fled.

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Attorney Raymond Babaian

A lawsuit filed today in San Bernardino County Superior Court says that the tragedy also brought to the surface unjust and racist behavior within the National Express Transit Corp., which runs the VVTA's public bus system.

“The company pushed back against a black supervisor when she tried to show some concern and support for her

slain colleague, who was also black,” said [Raymond Babaian](#), Founding Partner of [Valiant Law](#), the employment-law firm that filed the lawsuit. “The supervisor's bosses, who had a pattern of racist behavior, instead showed more support for the murderer, who was not black.”

In the lawsuit, field supervisor Latiesha Carter, who is African-American, accuses the bus company of racial discrimination, creating a hostile work environment, retaliation, wrongful termination and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Carter worked more than a decade for the VVTA's previous operator, and joined National Express when the Illinois-based company took over the bus agency's contract in October 2018.

Not long after the takeover, bus driver Travon Holiday was shot to death at a Hesperia apartment complex by another driver, who also killed the apartment complex manager, a witness to the Oct. 13 crime. Murder suspect Leslie “Lee” Wienke, also known as Lee Quinteros, escaped. Wienke's body was found five days later, inside his car parked along I-15 north of Las Vegas. He committed suicide.

According to the lawsuit, Carter's trouble started the day she learned of the murder, when she suggested an after-hours candlelight vigil outside the home of Holiday, a former subordinate.

Before the vigil, Carter says in the lawsuit, Sarah Esparza, a safety supervisor, called her and told her not to attend, warning her to “watch your back” and “be careful.” The company's senior lead safety trainer Josie Estremera then texted, ordering Carter not to wear her VVTA vest at the vigil.

Unlike other employee's deaths, Holiday's wasn't the subject of the customary remembrance at the monthly safety meeting held by HR representative and head safety training manager Sue Crane, while other employees were allowed to start a Go Fund Me for the murderer's family and given approved time off to attend his funeral, according to the lawsuit.

In the lawsuit, Carter says Crane ignored her complaints about disparate treatment of the two men's deaths. Carter, in the lawsuit, alleges that “Crane consistently favored non-African American employees over African-American employees... and believes that it is also common

knowledge that Crane subjected African-Americans to hyper-scrutiny and unrealistic demands and when these employees could not meet her demands, Crane frequently threatened termination.”

Over the next several weeks, Carter faced cyberbullying and intimidation from National Express managers, and was suspended on a trumped-up claim involving a broken windshield wiper on a van used by supervisors, according to the lawsuit. Then a confidential complaint she made to corporate human resources was leaked to other employees; no action was taken when she complained about the violation of her privacy, the lawsuit says.

On Jan. 3 her doctor determined she needed to take five days off to recover from stress and depression she was suffering due to the situation at work, the lawsuit says. She was fired the next day.

Valiant Law of Ontario, Calif., represents various individuals and entities in all aspects of employment claims, including harassment and discrimination, and wage and hour class actions in state and federal courts. With over a decade of legal practice in Southern California, including the Inland Empire, Los Angeles, Orange County, Riverside, San Diego County, as well as Las Vegas.

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