

Joanna Laiscell takes wrongful dismissal case against Hartford Board of Education to the federal appeals court

Veteran attorney Michael Sussman criticizes the Connecticut district court for 'not following basic legal principles' when it rejected Laiscell's original case.

HARTFORD, CT, USA, February 19, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Former Hartford Board of Education employee Joanna Laiscell has taken her wrongful dismissal case to federal appellate court after it was rejected by a district court judge.

Ms Laiscell was terminated from her position as a Financial Executive Director at the Board in 2018 after being accused of insurance fraud. In her original wrongful dismissal and discrimination case, Ms Laiscell provided evidence that the accusations against her were 'racially-motivated', with depositions from ex-colleagues suggesting a senior official at the Board 'harbored a grudge' against Ms Laiscell.

In her ruling, district court judge Vanessa L. Bryant found against Ms Laiscell, saying the case 'failed to satisfy the legal standard'.

Now, Ms Laiscell's new attorney, Michael Sussman, is taking up the fight in the federal appeals court.

A graduate of Harvard Law School, Attorney Sussman has been fighting for social and individual justice for more than 35 years. He says that cases like Ms Laiscell's, which make accusations against public officials or organizations, deserve to be heard by a jury - but many fail to get that far.

"Put simply, most cases like this are initially rejected and end up being appealed," he says. "Our courts have felt overwhelmed by civil rights cases and have, in my opinion, not followed basic legal principles in adjudicating such cases. The desire to 'be rid of the cases' seems to me far too prevalent and is a form of triaging which can do injustice to plaintiffs who have been genuinely let down by public organizations. We need a fairer system where the original cases are heard on their true merits."

Ms Laiscell's case centers on her termination by the Hartford Board of Education after more than 20 years of exemplary service. The stated reason for her dismissal was insurance fraud

discovered after an internal audit, despite no evidence, and no criminal complaint being lodged.

In a deposition as part of Ms Laiscell's original discrimination and wrongful dismissal case, her former colleague admitted that she was given explicit instructions by a supervisor to research Ms Laiscell's private affairs. This source's testimony went on to reveal that her supervisor clearly harbored a racially-motivated grudge against Ms Laiscell.

In a direct quote from the deposition, the source said that her boss 'made it quite clear before the audit that he had hatred towards Joanna', and that he told her: 'Don't worry about her. I'm working on getting rid of her.' The source also confirmed that her boss's acrimony towards Ms Laiscell was motivated primarily due to Ms Laiscell's race.

A recent report commissioned by Hartford Public Schools into the effectiveness of its Central Office function has acknowledged a lot of work needs to be done to address issues within the working environment. Respondents to a staff survey reported a 'toxic' and 'hostile' culture within the organization, as well as a lack of accountability, communications and professionalism in the leadership team.

For Ms Laiscell, the report is further evidence of a system that is stacked against people like her. Attorney Michael Sussman praised her for continuing to fight for justice despite constant opposition from her former employers, state officials, and the Connecticut judiciary.

Ms Laiscell's appeal is due to be heard in federal court in New York, outside the jurisdiction of the state of Connecticut. Attorney Sussman says this offers a much greater chance of a fair hearing, without the possibility of politics interfering with the rule of law.

"'Proper justice' is hard to define," Attorney Sussman says. "All litigants tend to believe in their own narratives. The system's job is to try to apply standards and precedent to each specific case while recognizing the uniqueness each presents. I believe Ms Laiscell did not get a fair hearing in her original application, despite overwhelming evidence backing up her claims, so we will keep persevering until she gets the chance to put her case to an independent court."

1. U.S. District Court, District of Connecticut (New Haven)

- Case Number: 3:20-cv-01463-VLB

2. US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

- Case Number: 24-11

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About Sussman & Associates

Sussman & Associates is a civil rights firm located in Goshen, NY. Michael Sussman has been fighting for social and individual justice for more than 46 years. He is well known as one of the top trial lawyers in the region. Christopher Watkins, Of Counsel, is an experienced and well-regarded trial attorney and litigator who has consistently obtained outstanding results for his clients. With a team of knowledgeable and hard-working staff, Heather M. Abissi, Esq., Mary Jo Whateley, Esq., Jonathan Goldman, Esq., and Geri Prescott, we comprise the law firm of Sussman & Watkins, dedicated to preserving civil rights and fighting for justice.

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