

A Cedar Rapids police officer stopped a young woman without cause and sexually harassed her. He then followed her home, expecting that she would be alone. Upon further investigation of this incident, it was discovered that over the years several other women had come forward with similar complaints against the same officer but he had somehow kept his badge and continued to sexually harass young women. Finally, two of the women went public with their complaints by filing a civil rights suit in federal court. Shortly thereafter, the city fired the police officer and later agreed to pay each woman \$45,000 in settlement of their complaints.

Relevant press articles follow:

Publication Name: THE GAZETTE

Publication Date: 11/27/2001 Headline: Cedar Rapids police officer sued over stop

Byline: Dick Hogan Section: B Page: 2 Column: Intro: Marion woman claims sexual abuse in July incident

Cedar Rapids police officer sued over stop

Marion woman claims sexual abuse in July incident

Dick Hogan

CEDAR RAPIDS - A Marion woman has made several accusations against a city police officer in a federal lawsuit, including sexual abuse or assault with intent to commit sexual abuse.

Casey F. Ralston, 20, made her allegations in a civil rights action filed Monday in U.S. District Court against Cedar Rapids Officer Reggie Harrelson, individually and in his official capacity.

The suit also names Safety Commissioner David Zahn, Police Chief Michael Klappholz, unnamed officers and the city.

Zahn and Klappholz are included in their official capacities because they are responsible for department operations.

Harrelson, 35, is a 10-year veteran on the Marion police force.

Klappholz said he had not seen the lawsuit and could not comment on it or any earlier complaint that may have been filed with the department. City Attorney Jim Flitz said he's read the complaint but had no comment other than noting it's very detailed and will require serious study.

Ralston seeks unspecified money damages from the officer and his supervisors in the suit filed in Cedar Rapids.

According to the suit, Harrelson made sexual comments, grabbed Ralston's buttocks and pulled her toward him during a traffic stop at 3:30 a.m. July 18 on First Avenue East in Cedar Rapids.

Ralston was concerned for her safety and left, but Harrelson appeared at her home shortly after 5 a.m., still in uniform, according to the complaint. Her mother was there and demanded that Harrelson leave immediately. Ralston lived in Cedar Rapids at the time.

Harrelson never told her why he asked her to pull over and that he also stopped a vehicle in which she was a passenger two years earlier for no apparent reason, Ralston claims.

Scott Peterson, Ralston's attorney, said she filed a complaint in July with the Police Department, but he's unaware of any action.

Ralston came to him with her story in late October, he said.

The civil action charges Harrelson with assault, battery, sexual abuse or assault with intent to commit sexual abuse, stalking, false imprisonment (for stopping her without reason) and misconduct in office.

The document alleges Zahn and Klappholz negligently failed to instruct, supervise, control and discipline Harrelson.

Ralston wants compensatory and punitive damages and reasonable attorney fees.

Publication Name: THE GAZETTE

Publication Date: 12/08/2001 Headline: More complaints of sexual harassment are made against C.R. police officer

Byline: Steve Gravelle Section: B Page: 3

More complaints of sexual harassment are made against C.R. police officer

CEDAR RAPIDS - Two more women have come forward with sexual harassment claims against a Cedar Rapids police officer, including one who joined a previously filed lawsuit.

Two weeks after citing Laura Wenger for having a headlight out, Officer Reggie Harrelson appeared at her home, entered without invitation, closed the door and forced a kiss on her, according to the amended complaint filed Friday. The alleged incident occurred Jan. 28.

Wenger's claims are similar to those made by Casey Ralston, 20. In a suit filed Nov. 26, Ralston alleges Harrelson made sexual comments, grabbed Ralston's buttocks and pulled her toward him during a traffic stop at 3:30 a.m. July 18 on First Avenue East in Cedar Rapids.

Ralston was concerned for her safety and left, but Harrelson appeared at her home shortly after 5 a.m., still in uniform, according to the complaint. Her mother was there and demanded that Harrelson leave immediately.

Harrelson, who was in uniform, told Wenger, 22, he came to her house to check her headlight, but left without examining her car, Wenger claims. After she rebuffed his attempt to kiss her, he forced a kiss on her cheek.

Both women made official complaints about Harrelson's behavior to the Police Department, but neither was informed of any disciplinary action, if any. Their suit also names Safety Commissioner David Zahn, Police Chief Michael Klappholz, other unnamed officers, and the city.

Zahn and Klappholz are included in their official capacities because they are responsible for department operations.

A third "similarly situated" woman contacted the women's attorney, Scott Peterson, after media reports of Ralston's suit. That woman, who has not joined the suit, said she made three complaints to the Police Department about being "assaulted, harassed and stalked" by Harrelson in 1995.

City and police officials declined comment on the case Friday.

"It's a complicated case, and there's a great deal of factual allegations," said City Attorney Jim Flitz.

"We're studying it."

Publication Name: THE GAZETTE

Outline: Reggie Harrelson Lawsuit alleges sexual harassment

Publication Date: 01/03/2002 Headline: C.R. officer being sued for harassment loses job

Byline: Steve Gravelle Section: B Page: 1

C.R. officer being sued for harassment loses job

Steve Gravelle

CEDAR RAPIDS - The Cedar Rapids police officer facing a sexual harassment lawsuit has left the Police Department.

Public Safety Commissioner Dave Zahn said Reggie Harrelson was dismissed, but other officials said little about the situation Wednesday.

"It's classified as a personnel matter, so there's no further comment I can give," said police Sgt. Joe Cerruto, the department's spokesman.

David Winney, the city's human resources director, confirmed Harrelson's departure.

Winney said Harrelson, 35, had worked for the department 10 years.

He left the department recently, "at least within the last few days."

Reached at his southwest Cedar Rapids home Wednesday night, Harrelson declined comment.

Casey Ralston of Marion filed a federal lawsuit Nov. 26 claiming Harrelson made sexual comments, grabbed her buttocks and pulled her toward him during a traffic stop at 3:30 a.m. July 18 on First Avenue East in Cedar Rapids.

Ralston, 20, alleged Harrelson appeared at her home shortly after 5 a.m., still in uniform.

Her mother was there and demanded that Harrelson leave immediately.

On Dec. 7, Laura Wenger, 22, joined Ralston's suit, claiming Harrelson made similar advances in January 2001.

Both women say they made official complaints about Harrelson's behavior to the Police Department, but neither was informed whether any disciplinary action was taken.

Their lawsuit also names Safety Commissioner David Zahn, Police Chief Michael Klappholz, other unnamed officers and the city.

Zahn and Klappholz are included in their official capacities because they are responsible for department operations.

Publication Name: THE GAZETTE

Graphic: COLOR PHOTO PHOTOS

Cutline: Reggie Harrelson Ex-C.R. officer Casey Ralston Said officer used intimidation Laura Wenger Called officer unprofessional

Publication Date: 12/20/2002 Headline: C.R. settles harassment suit

Byline: Rick Smith Section: B Page: 1

C.R. settles harassment suit

City pays \$90,000 to 2 women who allege officer stalked them

Rick Smith

CEDAR RAPIDS - The city has reached a \$90,000 financial settlement with two women who said a police officer harassed, stalked and assaulted them after routine traffic stops.

The officer, Reggie Harrelson, was dismissed from the Police

Department a year ago, several months after the women complained to the Police Department about him, but only weeks after the women sued him and the city in U.S. District Court in Cedar Rapids.

Harrelson had been on the force 10 years. He challenged his firing, then withdrew his appeal to the Cedar Rapids Civil Service Commission.

Scott Peterson, the Cedar Rapids attorney representing the two women, said on Thursday that the settlement reached this week with the city ends the matter for his clients, Casey Ralston, 21, and Laura Wenger, 24.

Both women had lived in Cedar Rapids at the time of their run-ins with Harrelson in 2001, but both since have moved elsewhere in Linn County because of the encounters, Peterson said.

City Auditor Bob McMahan reported on Thursday that the city had issued a check of \$45,000 to Ralston and her attorney and a check of \$45,000 to Wenger and her attorney.

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Peterson made note Thursday that the Police Department and city dismissed Harrelson "only after" the lawsuit was filed.

"From our perspective, this happened only because these two came forward and made a public issue of his conduct toward young women," Peterson said. "In effect, by filing the case, they said enough is enough."

"By doing so, not only did they stand up for themselves, but (they stood up) for all young women who have been the target of similar conduct."

In the lawsuit against Harrelson, Ralston stated that the officer grabbed her buttocks and then put his arms around her from behind and pulled her toward him as part of an early morning traffic stop on July 18, 2001. Harrelson then showed up, unwelcome, at

Ralston's home at 5 the same morning, the lawsuit said.

Ralston reported the matter to the Police Department on July 30, 2001.

Wenger said in the lawsuit that Harrelson made inappropriate comments when he issued her a warning for a burned-out headlight on Jan. 16, 2001. He then showed up in uniform at her residence on Jan. 28, 2001, saying he was checking on the headlight. He entered her house uninvited, pulled her toward him, attempted to kiss her on the lips and kissed her on the cheek, the lawsuit said.

Wenger complained to the Police Department on Jan. 29, 2001.

Ralston sued Harrelson and the city in federal court on Nov. 26, 2001, and Wenger joined the lawsuit on Dec. 7, 2001. With the matter now settled, Ralston on Thursday said she filed the lawsuit because she didn't believe a police officer should be able to don a uniform and see how many personal phone numbers he could obtain by intimidation.

"That is, in effect, a government-funded dating service for one," she said.

She said she hoped the city and its police officials had learned to identify "warning signs" so they can identify abusive police officers in the future.

"... I hope the safety commissioner, the police chief and other responsible officers are sorry - sorry for letting a man use and abuse his position of authority and sorry for putting so many like me in fear of police officers, who are here to protect and serve," Ralston said.

Wenger on Thursday called it unfortunate that the "unprofessional" Harrelson could "tarnish the badge the way he did." "I'm glad he is not privileged to work in this profession and hide behind his badge to harm and harass women in the community," Wenger said.

The lawsuit said a third woman filed three complaints against Harrelson with the Police Department in 1995, alleging assault, harassment and stalking.