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UK denies suit's claims of sexual discrimination

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UK has denied claims that the university police department discriminated against women on the basis of gender during their employment there, responding to the lawsuit in late October.

After that response, the seven women who filed the suit on Oct. 10 asked for additional documents and information regarding the case on Nov. 13 and 14, said their attorney, Robert Abell. UK has 30 days to respond, Abell said.

Abell said he expected UK's denial and is still confident in the case the women have made.

The suit names the defendants as the Board of Trustees, interim Police Chief Maj. Joe Monroe, former Vice President for Auxiliary Services Kenneth Clevidence and Alexandra McConnell, an administrative staff assistant in the police department.

The suit said women received harsher disciplinary action than men did and that UK officials retaliated against those who reported discrimination.

The women who filed the suit are Lisa Blankenship, Laura Marco, Bobbye Carpenter, Brenda Palmer, Tiua Chilton, Gina Wilson and Lori Creech. Three of the women are currently employed as officers in the department, three are former officers, and one is a former civilian staff member. Their complaints date back to the summer of 2005.

According to the lawsuit, Blankenship and Chilton met with UK President Lee Todd in late April or May of 2005 to discuss their concerns about what would happen if Monroe were appointed as chief of the UK Police Department. The university was in the midst of a search for a new police chief, a position that has not been permanently filled since November 2004.

The lawsuit stated that Todd decided to take an active role in the search after meeting with the women, but the defendants' response denied that claim.

While UK acknowledged in its response that the two women met with Todd, it defended itself against the women's concerns about mismanagement within the department. The response also refuted concerns that Monroe had taken a discriminatory and stereotypical attitude toward women.

In the 2005-06 search, Monroe was one of the final two candidates for chief. The other candidate,

former North Carolina Central University Police Chief McDonald Vick, was hired in February 2006. His appointment lasted until he resigned in July 2006 after information came to light that he had paid a former NCCU officer \$25,000 to drop a harassment complaint against him.

The lawsuit filed against UK claims that Clevidence knew about the sexual-harassment allegations against Vick but failed to disclose them. UK's response denies that claim.

The lawsuit also addresses the case of Blankenship, who was fired in July for health reasons. According to the lawsuit, she suffered a work-related injury in October 2006 and took a temporary leave on disability status, which UK's response confirmed.

The lawsuit states that UK told her in July that it could not accommodate her state of "total temporary disability" that would not allow her to return to work. The response denies that account.

On July 18, Monroe sent her a letter informing her of her termination from UK police, which the response confirmed.

Monroe, who has been the acting police chief since July 2006, declined to comment on the case, as did UK spokesman Jay Blanton.

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