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# Police Ignored Sexual Harassment In Teen Program, Suit Says

By Jonathan Capriel

Law360 (October 25, 2023, 7:41 PM EDT) -- Three women have hit the Aurora Police Department in Colorado with a sexual discrimination lawsuit over alleged harassment and groping they endured while participating in the city's teenager-focused law enforcement training program, saying officials not only allowed the behavior, but also kicked the plaintiffs out for complaining.

The lawsuit claims that supervisors in the program, the Aurora Police Department's Explorer Post 2024, disregarded complaints from female participants. The program enrolls teenagers who are 14 to 19 years old and identifies participants as "Explorers."

Notably, two of the plaintiffs claim that the same male participant in the program groped them while demonstrating a body search and other police procedures. Both women were kicked out of the program after complaining, but the male participant, identified only as S.A. in the suit, was allowed to graduate, according to the **complaint** filed Monday.

"Plaintiffs repeatedly complained about the inappropriate sexual harassment and discrimination they and other women experienced to numerous male and female supervisors [in the program], all to no avail," the lawsuit said. "After raising their complaints, plaintiffs were retaliated against by [the department], which used a minor incident as pretextual grounds to terminate all three plaintiffs."

The plaintiffs — Kaitlyn Rooney, Rupjot Nagra and Teona Mirceska — seek damages for violations of federal and state sex discrimination and employer retaliation laws. The lawsuit does not specify how old the plaintiffs were at the time of their involvement in the program, but it does suggest that some were minors at the time of the harassment.

S.A. sexually assaulted three female program participants, according to the lawsuit. The first incident involved a woman who is not a plaintiff in the action. He was not punished for this incident, but afterwards supervisors warned S.A. not to touch female Explorers "above the waistline," the suit claims.

But in November 2018, S.A. fondled Nagra's breast under the guise of demonstrating a body search in full view of other Explorers, the suit claims. Despite immediately complaining, Nagar said she was not taken seriously. One investigator told her that what she experienced was "nothing compared to an actual sexual assault," the suit said.

Program officials asked S.A. to write a "private" apology letter, the suit said. The Police Department gave her the letter "in an isolated office, forcing her to open and read it on the spot." Once she finished, she was ordered to "return it," the suit said.

No punishment was ever dished out, and S.A. continued to demonstrate searches on female Explorers, the lawsuit said.

In March 2019, Mirceska accused S.A. of inappropriately touching her during an exercise where she was to lay flat on her stomach in front of other program participants, the suit claims. He allegedly ran his hands up her back under her shirt, reaching all the way up to her bra line, the suit said. Mirceska immediately stopped his action by jumping up, the lawsuit said.

Her complaints were ultimately deemed "unfounded" by the program's officials.

"After assaulting plaintiff Mirceska, [the Police Department] again turned a blind eye and issued no discipline whatsoever to S.A.," the suit said. "Regarding plaintiff Mirceska, S.A. was not even asked to write an apology letter (which, even when he previously did, in no way constituted 'discipline,') and later graduated with full preference points."

Rooney claims that her immediate supervisor, a fellow Explorer identified as A.B., made multiple unwelcome sexual advances. After turning him down, he retaliated against her by penalizing her for rules violations. However, Rooney claims A.B. often intentionally misinterpreted the program's rules and sanctioned her for issues not actually written in the policy.

The lawsuit also says that program officials were particularly unprofessional when it came to commenting on the clothing of female Explorers. During a meeting where Rooney and her mother attempted to complain about A.B.'s behavior, an officer told them that jeans with holes in them might be appropriate if she was trying to be a "Victoria's Secret fashion model." Another officer told Nagra that "fat people" shouldn't wear leggings.

All three women were discharged from the program in July 2022. The lawsuit claims that the Police Department booted them out for their sexual harassment complaints, but the official reason the department pointed to was a "minor incident" involving a text-message exchange the women participated in that was later posted on a non-public social media account, the lawsuit said.

While the lawsuit does not go into details about this incident, it does say that the three women were the only ones punished despite male program participants also being involved.

The Aurora Police Department declined to comment.

The women are represented by Elliot A. Singer of Conduit Law LLC.

Counsel information for the Police Department was not immediately available.

The case is Kaitlyn Rooney et al. v. Aurora Police Department, case number 1:23-cv-02768, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado.

--Editing by Rich Mills.