

# Woman sues town for alleged sexual harassment

Lawyer for highway employee states, 'we have a very good case'

**By Jonathan Cook**

*Turley Publications Reporter*

WARREN – The Warren Highway Department is an alleged hostile zone of seething tension, a place where one employee's gender has made her a target, according to a complaint filed against the town in Worcester Superior Court on Oct. 2, 2009.

The case is currently in the discovery phase and has so far included at least one deposition.

The plaintiff is Warren Highway Department driver and laborer Patricia LeBoeuf, who claims she was mistreated in an ongoing manner by Foreman Raymond Blais.

According to the court claim, Blais grabbed her buttocks. The complaint further states that Blais allegedly said LeBoeuf is a "lesbian," "she needs a blood test," and "she likes them young."

At least some of those alleged incidents have a witness. Two other highway employees spoke of their concerns in court documents for how Blais mistreated LeBoeuf.

According to the town's internal sexual

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harassment investigation, former highway workers Armond Valois and Larry Pease agreed that, "Blais is generally verbally abusive to everyone in the department including the department head." The department head was Highway Surveyor Gary Odiorne, until he lost re-election Tuesday.

When asked Sunday evening if he was ever mistreated by Blais, Odiorne said, "that's water under the bridge." Otherwise, he wouldn't comment.

But for LeBoeuf, it is not water under the bridge. According to her complaint, the Board of Selectmen suspended Blais for three days and told Odiorne to keep Blais from working with LeBoeuf.

Instead, LeBoeuf claims, Odiorne threatened to discipline her if she would not work with Blais. When she continued to refuse, the complaint states, she was ordered to acquire a license that the other employees were not.

The town, through its attorney Patricia Rapinchuk, had no comment. Rapinchuk did say that she advised Blais not to speak with reporters. As a result, Blais was not reached for comment at the Highway Department or through his co-worker.

When he was deposed in court, Blais admitted saying LeBoeuf "likes them young" in front of a co-worker. Blais explained, "I was joking with Patty."

According to court documents, one of the questions put to Blais stated, "Did you ever say to her, 'I don't want you sleeping with Larry anymore?'"

Blais replied, "I remember that instance, yes."

"Larry" is a reference to a co-worker and LeBoeuf alleges she felt embarrassed and humiliated and on many occasions and told Blais to "knock it off."

She claims one time his response was, "That's your (expletive) problem."

Blais denies saying that in records obtained by the *Quaboag Current*.

On the other hand, Blais admits to asking her what she'd have to do to get an air brake license from a state trooper. LeBoeuf asserts that what Blais really said was a humiliating reference to oral sex. One highway employee recalled the same instance, according to the town's investigation. That report notes that Blais directed "negative comments" toward LeBoeuf.

In the deposition, Blais admitted that he has occasionally, while on the work site, joked about women's breast sizes.

LeBoeuf said she was feeling ill everyday and dreaded going to work. She said she saw a therapist and was told that she didn't need a therapist, she needed a lawyer.

Her attorney, Whitfield Larrabee, said, "We have a very strong case."

He added, "We will prove that Patricia LeBoeuf was subjected to intolerable and illegal sex discrimination and sexual harassment. Her supervisor has admitted to making a variety of sexually inappropriate statements to Ms. LeBoeuf, and the sexual harassment was confirmed by the town's own investigation."

Larrabee noted that the town is insured for liability, so Rapinchuk confirmed, but no settlement offer was made, both attorneys said.

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Restaurant

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As for the defendant's response in court, every alleged wrongdoing has been denied, one after another, "The defendant denies the allegations."

Affirmative defenses in the defendant's response included stating, "The discretionary function exemption applies so as to preclude any imposition of liability," and "the plaintiff's complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted."

This isn't the only controversy Blais has been involved with since 2008. In December of that year, he was under investigation by the state police regarding stolen town property. The property, a pair of backhoe buckets and a twister arm, was returned and Blais was suspended for 15 days by the Board of Selectmen and made to sign a "last chance agreement." No charges were filed in that matter.