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SF public housing guard sues official, agency alleging sexual harassment

Dominic Fracassa_Sep. 18, 2018

A security guard for the San Francisco Housing Authority claims he was sexually harassed by the agency's director of finance, Edwin Jamora, and has begun legal proceedings.

In a lawsuit against Jamora and the Housing Authority filed in San Francisco Superior Court last month, the security guard, Husam Qana, alleges that his repeated complaints about inappropriate sexual conduct went nowhere, even after he reported separate incidents to SFHA's legal counsel and human resources department.

Qana claims in his suit that his internal complaints were downplayed because of Jamora's high-ranking status within the housing department, and in retaliation the agency purposefully assigned him to guard a vacant building at 440 Turk St.

He had previously been working more closely with other staff members, including senior members of the housing commission. Now, he's set to begin guarding vacant housing units on Potrero Hill, Qana said.

"They cut everything," Qana said in an interview. "I'm not doing anything now. I'm all by myself and no one talks to me anymore."

Rose Marie Dennis, a spokeswoman for the housing authority, said the agency could not comment "on confidential personnel matters."

The first incident of inappropriate touching, Qana claims, happened in January 2017 while he and Jamora were in a car together "for a work-related purpose."

During the car ride, Jamora allegedly touched Qana's leg and hand on more than one occasion. When Qana asked what Jamora was doing, Jamora allegedly responded, "In the Philippines, it's normal," or words to that effect, according to the suit.

Qana claims he reported the incident to SFHA's legal counsel, who relayed it to the agency's human resources department. He was told that Jamora "had been spoken to and had been told to behave himself."

"I said, 'OK, so long as he behaves himself, that's fine,'" Qana said, but the inappropriate conduct allegedly escalated. According to the complaint, Jamora began grabbing, rubbing or caressing Qana's hands and legs and telling Qana that he wanted to kiss him.

In late March 2017, Qana alleges Jamora kissed him and, the next day, grabbed his hand and pulled it toward his body, causing Qana to touch Jamora's penis through his clothes.

Qana says SFHA's human resources department conducted an investigation after he reported the incident, but his allegations were found to be "not credible given weight of the evidence."

John Winer, Qana's attorney in the case, said the housing authority was dismissive of his claims of inappropriate conduct because he's a man.

"The reason this thing keeps getting ignored and not handled appropriately is because it's male-on-male and it doesn't cause as much concern as it should with the housing authority," he said. "A male can get sexually harassed just as badly as a female."

On top of the yet-unspecified damages Qana is seeking, Winer said he's also owed "hundreds of thousands of dollars" in unpaid wages from the housing authority.

"I would work seven days a week for 24 hours a day, but only get paid for 80 hours," Qana said.