

Suit Accuses Court Panel of Cover-Up

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A former lawyer for the state court system, fired in June from her job investigating lawyers charged with misconduct, has charged in a federal lawsuit that supervisors “whitewashed” some cases for “personal or political reasons.”

The lawyer, Christine C. Anderson, who was a staff attorney for six years in a Departmental Disciplinary Committee of the State Supreme Court’s Appellate Division in Manhattan, did not name the lawyers who she said received such protection. But she said her supervisors, who were named, intervened on behalf of lawyers against whom she had found “overwhelming concrete evidence of misconduct.”

The lawsuit, filed last week in the United States District Court for the Southern District, charges that Ms. Anderson was fired because she openly voiced her concerns about “a pattern and practice of whitewashing and routinely dismissing complaints leveled against certain select attorneys.” Ms. Anderson, 62, who is black, also said she was a victim of age and race discrimination.

Disciplinary committees operate in each of the state’s four Appellate Division departments to investigate lawyers accused of misconduct. Charges can vary from unresponsiveness toward clients, to the theft of money from escrow accounts, to failure to disclose conflicts of interest. Based on investigations by staff attorneys like Ms. Anderson, committees can admonish lawyers, suspend or revoke their licenses or recommend criminal prosecution.

In the suit, Ms. Anderson, who worked in the First Department, covering most of New York City and Westchester, named as defendants Thomas J. Cahill, chief counsel of the Departmental Disciplinary Committee; his first deputy, Sherry K. Cohen; Catherine O’Hagan Wolfe, the court clerk; David Spokiny, her deputy; and John Buckley, the presiding justice of the Office of Court Administration.

None could be reached for comment. David Bookstaver, a spokesman for the state court system, said it would be “inappropriate to comment.”

Fred K. Brewington, the Long Island lawyer representing Ms. Anderson, said she had been harassed on the job continuously, beginning in 2005, after she raised questions about Ms. Cohen’s relationship with a lawyer representing another lawyer who was under review. Despite strong evidence of misconduct by the lawyer in that case, he said, the complaint was dismissed and a file containing Ms. Anderson’s investigation disappeared.

Ms. Anderson is seeking \$10 million in damages, as well as punitive damages and lawyer's fees for what her suit described as the "irreparable injury," "mental anguish and humiliation" of being fired without cause.