


TULSA WORLD

Powered by the largest news staff in Northeastern Oklahoma

Visit tulsaworld.com for coverage of news, business, sports and entertainment.

 [Return to Story](#)

Tulsa County Sheriff's Office settles another racial-discrimination lawsuit

by: KEVIN CANFIELD World Staff Writer
Wednesday, May 04, 2011
5/4/2011 6:17:22 PM

Correction

This story originally incorrectly reported the employment status of La Shonna Nelson. The story has been corrected.

A seventh racial-discrimination lawsuit against the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office has been settled, with former employee Rolanda Harvey agreeing to dismiss her claims and the Sheriff's Office agreeing to pay \$80,000 of her legal fees.

Harvey will receive no payment from the county.

The settlement raises the total the Sheriff's Office has paid to resolve the cases to \$1,329,850.

The figure includes \$610,000 in settlements paid to former employees; \$639,850 paid to the law firm McAfee & Taft to represent the Sheriff's Office; and the \$80,000 paid to Harvey's attorney, Daniel Smolen.

Undersheriff Brian Edwards on Tuesday denied any wrongdoing by the Sheriff's Office.

"The Tulsa County Sheriff's Office found itself facing claims by disgruntled employees and former employees," Edwards said. "The Sheriff's Office had legitimate nondiscriminatory reasons for all of its employment decisions related to the seven employees who filed race-discrimination lawsuits.

"Although there was no race discrimination of any type with respect to these employees, we believe the taxpayers' interests were best served by putting an end to the ongoing litigation and its associated costs."

Smolen dismissed Edwards' characterization of the plaintiffs as disgruntled employees, saying the department's internal documents supported the plaintiffs' allegations.

"The sworn statements provided by both current and former Tulsa County Sheriff's Office employees depict a department that has failed to modernize its policies and procedures as well as its views on minorities," Smolen said.

He added: "The future cost of litigation, ultimately passed on to the taxpayer, will continue despite these settlements if the department continues to resist the very much-needed changes, which are imposed by both state and federal law."

Harvey was a detention officer at the Tulsa Jail, which is operated by the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office.

Like the other six former employees who sued the Sheriff's Office, she alleged that she was treated

differently from other employees based on her race.

Specifically, she claimed that white officers routinely used offensive language in front of her; that no corrective action was taken when she complained about the offensive language; and that she was demoted after she complained about the offensive language.

The lawsuit also claims that Harvey was denied promotions and positions for which she was qualified and that those promotions and positions were awarded to less-qualified white employees.

In addition, it claims that Harvey was unfairly disciplined and ultimately fired in violation of the federal employment statutes prohibiting discrimination.

According to court documents filed by the Sheriff's Office, Harvey was fired for admittedly having a sexual relationship with an inmate and smuggling drugs and other items to him.

The settlements have been paid out of the county's general and sinking funds, which are funded primarily through property taxes.

Smolen's law firm, Smolen, Smolen & Roytman, has two other lawsuits pending against the Sheriff's Office.

The first is a racial discrimination case filed on behalf of a black jail employee named La Shonna Nelson.

The second lawsuit seeks damages related to the suicide of a jail inmate.

Original Print Headline: Sheriff's Office settles racial-discrimination suit

Kevin Canfield 918-581-8313

kevin.canfield@tulsaworld.com

Associated Images:

Settlement agreements

<u>Plaintiff Settlement</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>County's legal fees</u>
Taneisha Taylor	\$25,000	\$34,137
Dana Marie Moses	\$35,000	\$29,582
Kristy Peters	\$225,000	\$45,446
Cherry Anjorin	\$130,000	\$46,136
Ronald Hodge	\$70,000	\$40,274
Charles Wimberly	\$125,000	\$168,557
Rolanda Harvey	\$0.00	\$275,718*
Totals	\$610,000	\$639,850

* Figure does not include \$80,000 paid by the county for Harvey's legal fees.