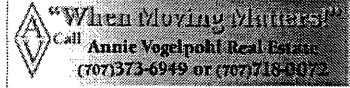


Search For:

Current: 52°F
 Humidity 100, Pressure 30.24
 Sunrise: 7:14 am Sunset: 7:19 pm



[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Solano Life](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Digital DR](#) | [Contact Us](#)

[Media Gallery](#) | [Calendars](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Digital Digest](#) | [Submit Press Release](#) | [Submit Vacation Stop](#)

County settles sexual harassment lawsuit

By Jess Sullivan

Daily Republic

FAIRFIELD - Solano County taxpayers will spend \$610,000 to settle a lawsuit claiming sexual harassment in the workplace and retaliation by a top local official.

The 2007 lawsuit against the county by two current employees and one former employee of the Solano County Public Defender's office settled Tuesday on the eve of a civil jury trial.

Lawyers for the county have agreed to pay the money to settle the lawsuit that claimed the employees endured the sexual harassment and gross behavior of a coworker and when they complained Public Defender Jeffrey Thoma targeted them for complaining.

Thoma declined to comment on the settlement and the accusations. He referred questions to the county's contracted attorney. The county is self-insured.

'We are currently in the process of settling. Both sides believe the settlement is reasonable and avoids a protracted trial and attorney costs,' said Martha Stringer, the contracted attorney for the county. 'The county admits no liability.'

The current employees, Deputy Public Defender Kathryn Barton and staff secretary Lisa Driscoll, and former deputy public defender Patrick Riggs could each receive about \$143,000. Stringer said the trio's legal costs were included in the settlement amount.

'From the plaintiffs' perspective we feel this begins to fairly compensate them for what they have gone through. It is our hope through this settlement a healing process can begin,' said Stan Casper, attorney for the trio.

The settlement doesn't require Thoma's resignation, an original and long-standing condition the trio opted to recently drop. They had also previously asked for \$3.7 million to settle. The county previously offered \$300,000 to settle out of court.

County Administrator Michael Johnson and County Counsel Dennis Bunting didn't respond to inquires about the settlement. Before the lawsuit was filed the pair had disciplined Thoma for his management practices.

'Simply, one does not manage through fear,' the reprimand stated. 'You must address two pervasive themes: your fixation on issues of personal loyalty, trust and lack of fitness to supervise and your anger, which adversely diminish your management skills and render you vulnerable to future retaliation claims. . .

'Your continued support of (the harassing coworker) even after her misconduct became clear only made this unhealthy condition worse. . . . Many employees remain divided, distrustful and angry at people perceived to be in a different camp.'

The harassing coworker, an attorney hired by Thoma, left her job after one year, receiving a \$25,000 golden parachute from the county, according to court records.

Reach Jess Sullivan at 427-6919 or jsullivan@dailyrepublic.net