

Lieutenant suspended for sexist comments

Department is accused of sex discrimination

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GREEN BAY - A Green Bay police lieutenant was suspended and re-assigned last year after making derogatory comments about female officers, including one instance in which he remarked about an officer's genitals.

The statements came to light in an ongoing complaint filed with the state accusing the police department of sex discrimination. The complaint to the state Department of Workforce Development was filed by Officer Tracy Liska, a school resource officer who had previously filed an internal complaint against her supervisor, Lt. Jeff Brester.

Brester was suspended for three days without pay in July 2018 after an internal police investigation determined he had said something similar



Brester

to, "If it wasn't for the c---s in the (school resource officer) program" during a private conversation with another officer, according to records obtained by the Press-Gazette. Brester used the expletive, a derogatory

term for women, in reference to multiple female officers, including Liska, according to the complaint.

He also commented on the tightness of a female officer's pants, saying no one wanted to see her "camel toe." The slang refers to the appearance of a woman's groin in tight pants or shorts.

It is unclear who specifically Brester was referring to, as names are redacted in department documents.

Brester is the latest officer known to be disciplined for inappropriate comments and actions in a department tarnished by racist and harassing behavior among night-shift employees.

Brester recalled the tight pants exchange when interviewed by police investigators and said he may have used the word c---, but he said he did so privately, out of frustration, and not directly to the person.

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Brester

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He did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this story.

Brester oversaw the department's school resource officers in his position as detective supervisor. In addition to the three-day suspension, he was reassigned to serve as a supervisor in the patrol division and required to attend training sessions.

"I do not believe you harbor any misogynistic behavior toward women," Police Chief Andrew Smith wrote in Brester's discipline letter. "But, the remarks you made, whether made out of frustration, stress, or the pressure of the job, are totally unacceptable. You showed a lack of leadership that your title and position had entrusted to you."

Brester, who's been with the department for 20 years, now has a last chance agreement in his personnel file, meaning any future misconduct could result in discipline up to a loss of rank or discharge. Smith told the Press-Gazette that there haven't been any issues with Brester since last year's incident.

"We believe that people should be given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes," he said.

Department accused of sex discrimination

Liska complained to the department about Brester in March 2018 and in October, she filed the complaint with the state Department of Workforce Development accusing the department of sex discrimination. Both complaints came after Liska was suspended for spending time with another officer, causing her to be late in reporting to her assigned school.

Liska also failed to respond to a disturbance call at one of her assigned schools in January 2018, documents show.

Liska's complaint to the state cites Brester's comments as evidence of sex discrimination by the department. It also alleges:

■ In reference to rumors of Liska's relationship with the male officer, Brester said something similar to, "You know, one minute you're sitting squad-to-squad and the next minute someone is (involved in sexual activity)."

■ Brester viewed video recordings of Liska performing sedentary work during her administrative leave and told her she wore the wrong clothing to work one day.

■ Liska received a harsher punishment than the male colleague with whom she spent time on duty.

■ Another male colleague also did not respond to the January 2018 disturbance call, but was not questioned or disciplined.

When speaking to internal investigators, Brester denied making the squad car comment. Objecting to the state complaint, an attorney for the city argued that the two male colleagues were not in similar situations as Liska and therefore weren't treated more favorably. The city also argued it's not discrimination to ask an employee why they aren't properly dressed for work.

"Her complaint appears to be in retaliation against Lt. Brester and indirectly, the Chief, for the audacity to hold her accountable," the attorney wrote to the Department of Workforce Development's Equal Rights Division.

The division dismissed the complaint in February after finding Liska failed to prove that she was disciplined

because she's a woman. And while calling her a c--- was "deplorable," the division ruled, it doesn't violate fair employment law.

Liska appealed the decision last month, meaning the case will be heard before an administrative law judge. The process begins with a phone conference prior to the hearing, which will be scheduled sometime over the next few months, records show.

The police department is waiting to hear the outcome of Liska's appeal, but Smith emphasized that he won't tolerate harassment and aims to ensure the environment is "squeaky clean." If officers don't learn from their mistakes, he said, he has no problem walking them out the door.

The night-shift probe, for example, led to the dismissal of one officer and the resignations of two others. Several others were suspended.

"We want to send a strong message that what you did was inappropriate and it better not happen again," Smith said.

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