

ROLL CALL

Former Law Librarian Hit With Suit

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Roll Call Staff

A recently filed lawsuit claims that former Library of Congress Law Librarian Rubens Medina sexually harassed employees for years, intimidating his female co-workers by touching them inappropriately, complimenting their bodies and interjecting conversations with sexual innuendos.

Theresa Papademetriou, the senior foreign law specialist who filed the lawsuit, claims Medina's "pattern of harassment" was widely known among Library officials and yet repeatedly ignored. As the law librarian, Medina oversaw the operations of the nation's largest law collection. He retired in 2008 after 14 years in that position.

Library officials say they are reviewing Papademetriou's lawsuit, which lays out Medina's alleged behavior in detail. In November 2007, for example, Papademetriou claims Medina came to her office, closed the door and "stared at Ms. Papademetriou's breasts, below her waist, and her pelvic area." He then walked over to her desk.

"As Ms. Papademetriou turned around in her chair to face him, she discovered that Dr. Medina had come so close to her that his body was touching her chair and his waistline was close to her face," the lawsuit reads. "Dr. Medina then reached out his hand and caressed Ms. Papademetriou's face. He moved his hand under her chin and stroked her cheek in a sexual way."

The lawsuit also details the experiences of other employees — whose positions are described but who are left unnamed — during Medina's 37-year tenure at the Law Library. For many, the alleged harassment included comments about their figures and inappropriate touching on their backs and faces, according to the lawsuit. In 2005, the lawsuit claims, Medina began working with a new assistant and "spoke to her in a sexually inappropriate way."

"On one occasion," the lawsuit reads, "Dr. Medina began a conversation by saying; 'You might not want to hear this.' She responded 'Well don't say it,' but Dr. Medina proceeded anyway and asked 'Have you ever tasted human breast milk?' She responded 'Stop the conversation,' but Dr. Medina continued, 'I've tasted breast milk.'"

Papademetriou's attorney, Bruce Fredrickson, said the women are kept anonymous because they are not included in the lawsuit.

Nevertheless, their experiences help establish that Medina's behavior was not isolated and provide a "basis" for Papademetriou's allegations, he said.

Papademetriou filed the complaint at the end of August, and so far, the Library hasn't responded. LOC spokesman Matt Raymond said Library officials are reviewing it with the U.S. Attorney's Office, which will represent the agency. Roberta Shaffer, who became law librarian on Aug. 31, also will look into the matter, Raymond said.

Since in-house complaints are confidential, it's unclear how many women complained about Medina during his tenure. Papademetriou claims "several women" complained over the years, including one who brought a lawsuit in 1985 and settled with the Library. Raymond said he couldn't comment, citing the ongoing litigation.

But allegations involving Medina were made to the Library's Inspector General, though IG Karl Schornagel said the details were confidential. And in 2002, Medina's name came up in a sexual discrimination case. The Library eventually settled, paying \$230,000 to Nancy Lee Jones, who claimed that a less-qualified male applicant was selected for a position for which she also applied.

In the interview for the position of director of legal research, Medina "inquired about her ability to work with people from different cultures who might not have a tradition of equal opportunity for women," according to documents for Jones' case. Medina later selected one of two men who applied for the position.

In her lawsuit, Papademetriou claims the Library "acquiesced in Medina's harassment of women by its tolerance, failure to discipline, and failure to adequately train him." Though Medina retired in 2008, Papademetriou claims that Library officials have allowed him to visit the Library since then; he has also been honored for his work as law librarian.

In the lawsuit, Papademetriou asked the court for compensatory damages and attorney's fees. Fredrickson said they will also ask that the Library develop policies to help the agency comply with the law, including sexual harassment classes.