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Professor Who Alleges She Was Raped by Colleague Claims St. Lawrence Officials Advised Her Not to Get Attorney



The complaint said the university and its retained outside counsel “improperly” solicited evidence and information from Doe while she remained shaken and in a vulnerable state and had been without legal counsel.



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Civil Rights

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Litigation Reporter



An assistant professor of St. Lawrence University alleges she was raped by a colleague at his home last spring, and the institution did little to investigate while wrongly advising that she couldn't retain counsel, according to a federal lawsuit filed by the New York City-based Wigdor firm.

The plaintiff, an unnamed educator at St. Lawrence University, located in the North Country region of New York state, named Ernesto Moralez and the university as co-defendants in the civil rights complaint.

Moralez is an assistant professor and co-chair of public health at St. Lawrence. A school spokesman said he has since been placed on administrative leave.

The plaintiff told school officials Moralez sexually assaulted and raped her when she went to his home to plan courses on April 12, 2022, the first time the two had met in person, Wigdor partner Jeanne Christensen wrote in the complaint, which was filed Wednesday.

When Doe said it was time for her to go home, Moralez, according to the lawsuit, insisted that she try a mixed drink.

During the next four hours, the alleged victim lost the ability to form words, control her body movements, and lost her memory other than finite flashbacks, the complaint read.

The lawsuit alleges that university officials failed to issue an investigative finding while continuing to employ Moralez. However, a university spokesperson refuted those claims.

The complaint said the university failed to investigate reports that Moralez had engaged in prior alleged sexual misconduct before coming to St. Lawrence University in 2020.

“No female employee should be forced to work for an employer who fails to protect her from sexual violence,” Christensen said in a statement.

The complaint said the university and its retained outside counsel “improperly” solicited evidence and information from Doe while she remained shaken and in a vulnerable state and had been without legal counsel.

It goes on to say university officials falsely told Doe that she was prohibited from retaining her own legal counsel during the investigation.

University spokesperson Kim Asch said the school has a process for investigating misconduct allegations and retained an experienced independent investigator.

“The University respects the right of all parties to receive due process and provided support when the faculty member notified us of the allegations,” Asch said.

“Additionally, the University has a rigorous pre-employment referencing and background check process. Nothing in that background check process, or in anything the University has received since, has established any prior employment-related misconduct as alleged in the complaint.”

“The University believes there are substantial defenses to this complaint and will respond in court,” Asch said.

A police sergeant with the Canton police said he couldn't speak about the criminal investigation.

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