

LONG ISLAND

# Lawsuit says Oceanside animal hospital fired vet for complaints about substandard care



The Animal Surgical Center in Oceanside on Monday. Credit: Howard Schnapp

By Robert Brodsky

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A veterinarian fired from an Oceanside animal hospital has filed a federal lawsuit that charges her dismissal came after she expressed concern over what she said was a litany of illegal practices there, including using unlicensed technicians and unsafely administering drugs to pets.

Dr. Mariana Pardo, 42, of Westchester, was hired in July 2022 as a veterinary critical care specialist at the Animal Surgical Center of Long Island and tasked with establishing the facility's emergency department. Ten months later,

she was fired, the suit says, just weeks after she told the hospital's founder, Dr. Tomas Infernuso, that she was pregnant.

The suit alleges Infernuso retaliated against her claims of veterinary misconduct with a barrage of harassment, culminating in her termination.

The lawsuit, filed Jan. 10 in the Eastern District of New York in Central Islip, seeks unspecified damages and alleges ASC and Infernuso violated the federal Family and Medical Leave Act and the state's Human Rights Law.

In an interview, Pardo, who gave birth to a healthy son four months ago, said her tenure at the hospital "was extremely stressful. I ended up at the ER twice ... I was not sleeping."

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Messages left with Infernuso at the Oceanside animal hospital and with his wife at his home were not returned. ASC also has a surgical and rehabilitation center in East Meadow.

"We're hoping that Dr. Infernuso and his practice changes the way it treats patients; changes the way he treats customers, who are the owners of these pets, and changes the way they treat their employees," said David Gottlieb, one of Pardo's two Manhattan-based attorneys.

Infernuso, the suit alleges, recruited Pardo, who has been practicing veterinary medicine for 15 years, to join his practice to develop a 24/7 emergency room and ICU.

Pardo said she negotiated several benefits with Infernuso, including maternity considerations, flexible hours and equity in the company – although the terms were not formalized in an employment contract.

In the ensuing months, Pardo said she learned that ASC was illegally using unlicensed veterinary technicians to monitor anesthesia, administer intravenous medication and complete medical records.

Pardo said she raised concerns that the company improperly diluted pain medication, such as fentanyl, used in veterinary surgeries and that drugs were being administered by nonlicensed staff members. For example, in January 2023, Pardo said an assistant gave an animal 20 times the recommended dose of fentanyl, leading to an overdose that she was able to reverse.

“These animals are being put at risk with some of the anesthesia protocols that are being performed and with the medical decision-making,” said Pardo, who reported the issues to the company's human resources department but did not file a formal complaint to the state.

Pardo began to document issues related to “poor quality of care and sloppy mistakes that exposed patients to harm and ASC to legal risks,” the suit said. They include a lost liver biopsy, medication not properly stored, incorrectly performed CPR by the surgical team, incorrect medication given to animals, a dog with neurological issues and heart problems who went untreated for a day, and major mistakes and overcharging in pet owners' bills.

The suit contends that Pardo brought her concerns to Infernuso but that he was hostile toward her complaints, then refused to provide her with the negotiated benefits, extended her hours and declined to provide time off for medical needs or for accommodations related to her pregnancy.

Pardo said the relationship deteriorated further when she intervened on behalf of a male veterinary assistant who complained that Infernuso had made “insensitive and discriminatory comments about his body and posture.”

On May 5, Pardo said she was terminated, with Infernuso telling her “we're not aligned,” the suit contends.



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