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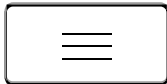
 Wednesday, April 8, 2015

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Georgia settles whistleblower complaint against ex-Guard head

Posted: 3:39 p.m. Monday, April 6, 2015

By [Greg Bluestein](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The state of Georgia has settled another whistleblower complaint that involved damaging accusations about a top official.

Georgia agreed to pay \$480,000 to MaryTherese Grabowski, who filed a lawsuit in 2014 alleging that she was forced from her job as a spokeswoman at the Georgia National Guard after she said she refused to cover for then-Adjutant General Jim Butterworth's "unethical and inappropriate conduct."



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Butterworth is one of Gov. Nathan Deal's top allies and was tapped in December to lead the Georgia Emergency Management Administration, a high-profile duty that involves directing the state's disaster response.

"I stand by my lawsuit. I believed that I was doing the right thing," Grabowski said Monday morning. "I hated that it happened at all, but I have too much respect for the men and women of the Guard and the great state of Georgia to not do my job."

4 settlements in past year

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The state has settled at least four lawsuits against top Georgia officials in the past year, including a payment of about \$2 million in June to come to terms with three former state ethics staffers who claimed they were improperly threatened for too vigorously investigating claims against Deal.

The Guard said in a statement Monday that the settlement included no admission of wrongdoing and that it was “agreeable” to both sides. In an earlier response to the lawsuit, a Guard spokesman said that Grabowski was fired after refusing a reassignment and not for any behavior that would be protected by the whistleblower statute.

Grabowski’s July 2014 lawsuit claimed that Butterworth misused his office by offering donors an invite to an “exclusive” barbecue at the Clay National Guard Center in connection with a 2012 AFLAC Cancer Center charity drive.

It also said Butterworth told Grabowski to ban WAGA-TV reporters from access or interviews with Guard staffers “until they get right with me” and that his wife improperly asked her to publicize a country singer, Kaley Caperton, who was a friend of the couple.

And it questioned her former boss’ trip with Deal to the Paris Air Show in 2013 amid planned government furloughs. She said she was told at the time that he was attending as a guest of the governor’s office, but she said he stayed overseas several extra days.

Recent scrutiny and praise

Butterworth, a former state senator, came under scrutiny in 2012 after he was boosted several ranks by the governor to lead the Guard. He was more recently praised for his handling of recent wintry weather that ground much of Georgia to a halt.

The lawsuit was brought by Kim Worth, who also brought the whistleblower lawsuit for former ethics chief Stacey Kalberman, who claimed she was unfairly forced from her post for investing ethics complaints against Deal too aggressively. A jury awarded Kalberman more than \$1 million after a weeklong trial.

Grabowski, a former TV anchor who now lives in Washington, said she feels vindicated by the settlement.

“It shouldn’t have come to this. I lost a job that I love. I lost my home. I had to move away,” said Grabowski, who is now an author of children’s books. “But I’m OK. I’m going to be OK.”

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