

## POCONO RECORD

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# Frein case dispatcher says cops tried to silence rape allegation

### Wednesday

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By Terrie Morgan-Besecker, The Times-Tribune (TNS)

Fearful it would make the department look bad, Pennsylvania State Police attempted to silence a dispatcher present during a fatal ambush at the Blooming Grove barracks from disclosing a trooper there raped her about a year before the attack, she claims in a lawsuit.

Nicole Palmer of Dunmore alleges various officials with the department went to extraordinary lengths to keep her quiet, including having her involuntarily committed to a mental institution based on false allegations she threatened suicide.

Because she filed a lawsuit and has been identified by name in previous stories, The Times-Tribune named Palmer.

When she persisted in demanding the trooper who assaulted her be charged, officials launched an investigation — not of her attacker, but of her — based on claims that she told two troopers she was offered \$1 million to keep quiet.

The explosive allegations are contained in a 36-page lawsuit recently filed in Lackawanna County Court.

State police on Tuesday filed paperwork seeking to transfer the case to federal court.

Contacted Tuesday evening, Major James Degnan, area commander for the state

police for Northeast Pennsylvania, said he could not comment on the suit, citing the department's policy not to comment on pending litigation.

The lawsuit, filed by attorneys Kevin Dempsey and Michael Gallacher of Clarks Green, is among two Palmer filed related to the ambush. She also has a lawsuit pending in Pike County Court against Frein for emotional injuries she suffered as a result of the Sept. 12, 2014, sniper attack at the Blooming Grove barracks that killed Cpl. Bryon K. Dickson II and wounded Trooper Alex T. Douglass.

Palmer was the civilian dispatcher on duty the night of the ambush and attempted to drag Dickson into the barracks in the moments after he was shot. Frein was captured 48 days later and charged with homicide and multiple other offenses. His criminal trial is scheduled to begin on April 3 in Pike County.

The latest lawsuit says authorities investigating the motive for the ambush asked Palmer if she ever had a sexual relationship with a senior trooper at the barracks, who is not identified in the suit.

According to the suit, Palmer revealed the trooper in question, who was her superior, raped her in the summer of 2013 and thereafter continued to sexually harass her at work. Among her claims were that the trooper exposed his genitals to her, repeatedly showed her sexually suggestive photos, sent her degrading text messages and told her of his sexual escapades with other women. He also repeatedly placed his hands on her shoulders and neck and made sexually suggestive comments to her.

One month after she disclosed the information, she was summoned to a meeting in Harrisburg with Lt. William M. Bowen and Sgt. Michael R. Brownmiller, who told her not to tell anyone about the rape or sexual harassment. Brownmiller then called her several times afterward and again directed her to remain silent. When Palmer told him she wanted to press charges, he repeatedly questioned her decision. The trooper in question was never charged.

In January 2015, Palmer was summoned to a meeting in Bethlehem, purportedly to answer whether she had been offered \$1 million to stay quiet. Six days before the meeting, Trooper Mark Pajalich and Trooper Brian Slovinski appeared at her home and advised her she would be involuntarily committed to a psychiatric facility because someone, whom they refused to name, claimed she was going to

commit suicide.

Palmer and her boyfriend, who is a member of the state police, assured them she was not suicidal. Pajalich told her she would be forcefully committed and fired from the state police if she did not comply.

Pajalich and Slovinski then transported her to a facility, where Pajalich completed paperwork to have her involuntarily committed. She was released several hours later after a psychiatrist determined there was no basis for the commitment.

The suit says an attorney representing Palmer in a workers' compensation claim related to the ambush asked a state police official how such an improper psychiatric commitment could take place and he replied, "We take care of our own."

About a month later, state police mailed Palmer notice she had to undergo a psychiatric examination related to her workers' compensation claim on March 5. Officials knew she had received notice. Despite that, Lt. Craig Carey appeared at her home and "ordered" her to attend the evaluation, the suit says.

The lawsuit seeks damages on 10 counts for violations of her constitutional rights, false imprisonment, gender discrimination, intentional infliction of emotional distress and punitive damages.

Brownmiller, Bowen, Pajalich, Slovinski and Carey are named as defendants. Also named are state police commissioner Tyree Blocker, former commissioner Frank Noonan and Lt. Christopher Paris.

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