

HARRIS: EX-AIDE'S COMPLAINT IS REVENGE - FIRED EMPLOYEE ALLEGES HARASSMENT

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A city investigator is looking into charges that Seattle City Councilwoman Sherry Harris sexually harassed a former aide.

Harris, who is up for re-election this fall and has already drawn one opponent, denied the allegations yesterday. She contended she fired the aide last month for poor job performance.

"As an African American, as a woman, as a lesbian, as a citizen and as a person, I have always considered discrimination and harassment abhorrent," Harris said in prepared statement.

"Anyone who knows me or has dealt with me, either personally or professionally, knows that any rumor, innuendo, claim or suggestion of harassment or discrimination on my part is absurd, as the facts behind any such suggestion will show."

The former aide, 29, did not return telephone calls today.

Citing confidentiality rules, Carolyn Van Noy, executive director of the city's Ethics and Elections Commission, declined to confirm the existence of the investigation.

But Harris, her political consultant, Cathy Allen, and Ken Vincent, another Harris aide, all said they were contacted by Van Noy in recent weeks after the former aide apparently complained.

As a result, Harris and her advisers decided to come out with a statement "to get ahead" of the allegations, which had started to swirl in political circles in Olympia and Seattle.

"I don't know specifically what the allegation is," Harris said, alleging the former aide had tried to blackmail her into reconsidering her decision to fire her for poor work performance.

"If you don't hire me back, I'm going to file a discrimination suit against you based on race, on sex harassment . .

. and a grievance for wrongful termination," Harris quoted the former aide as telling her.

Harris said she had not heard back from Van Noy, nor had she seen any written statement laying out what exactly it is that she allegedly did wrong.

Harris said she first met the aide last March when the aide started as a volunteer intern in her City Council office. In retrospect, Harris said last night, she wishes she had checked the aide's employment history more closely.

The council member has since learned that the aide earlier filed a discrimination complaint against her former employer, Seattle Municipal Court.

A source at the court said that a judge fired Harris' former aide, and that the dismissal was upheld in administrative proceedings after an appeal.

The case may still be pending at a higher administrative level or even a judicial level, the source said.

The aide worked for Harris as a volunteer until October, when she started as a one-day-a-week paid intern for a probationary period.

"There were a couple of areas where I felt her skills were not up to standard," Harris recalled.

The event that clinched the aide's fate, Harris said, was when she returned to Municipal Court and, representing herself as a Harris aide, threatened an investigation into the court's hiring practices. That pronouncement caused a quick and angry reaction from the then-presiding judge, Nicole MacInnes, who asked Harris whether she was aware of her aide's employment history, Harris recalled.

Harris said that when she told the aide in December that things weren't working out, the aide said she might join the campaign of John Manning, a Seattle Police sergeant who has filed to run against Harris.

Last night, Manning said the former Harris aide was in no way connected to his campaign

- **Caption:** PHOTOSHERRY HARRIS
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