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Former South Kingstown Employee Files Lawsuit Alleging Harassment and Retaliation

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— Categories: Human Rights



A former wastewater treatment plant employee has filed a federal lawsuit against the Town of South Kingstown, claiming she was subjected to sexual harassment, discrimination, and retaliation that led to her firing.

Emily Spring, who was hired in 2020 as the first female Wastewater Operator at the plant since it opened in the 1970s, alleges that her workplace was unwelcoming and hostile from the start. According to her lawsuit, the facility lacked adequate bathrooms and locker rooms

for women. Instead, management proposed she use a “unisex shower” by modifying the men’s facilities, which Spring described as unsafe and inappropriate.

In early 2021, she discovered a large collection of pornographic magazines in a bathroom used by employees. Spring also reports that later that year, a new trainee, Seth Vallee, began sending her unwanted and explicit messages. She says Vallee asked for her Snapchat information and soon started sharing videos of himself having sex with other women. When she told him to stop, he allegedly continued to harass her and later insulted her when she refused his advances.

In January 2022, Spring formally complained to her supervisor, Kathy Perez, and the human resources department. Another employee also reported Vallee’s inappropriate behavior. Although HR said they would investigate and follow up, Spring states she never received any written report about the outcome.

Following her complaint, Spring claims she experienced retaliation. Her supervisor, Shaun Collum, allegedly began calling her “stupid” and “dumb” in front of coworkers. Despite her concerns, management required her to continue working closely with Vallee, including a twelve-hour overnight shift.

Spring also says Collum regularly made sexist and demeaning remarks. When she tried to report his behavior, she was told she would have to “work it out” because he was her trainer.

In August 2022, she was fired after human resources said she had posted TikTok videos at work. According to the lawsuit, the town had no policy banning social media use and never warned her about it.

Spring’s lawsuit claims violations of civil rights laws, failure to provide a safe work environment, and retaliation for reporting misconduct. Town officials have not commented publicly on the case.

The lawsuit highlights the challenges women can face in traditionally male-dominated workplaces and raises questions about how complaints are handled.