

Sykesville fire company files response to discrimination lawsuit

By Brett Lake Times Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, May 29, 2013 12:00 am

An attorney for the Sykesville-Freedom District Fire Department said a former female firefighter was fired in 2011 because of performance issues, not because of pregnancy and gender discrimination claimed in the woman's lawsuit.

Robin Lancaster, of Westminster, filed the lawsuit last month in Carroll County Circuit Court, which was later moved to U.S. Federal Court in Baltimore. She worked for the fire department from December 2008 until November 2011, when she was let go.

Attorney Jo Anna Schmidt, counsel for the fire department, said Tuesday Lancaster was fired for performance issues but declined to comment further on the specific performance issues.

The defense filed the answer to the complaint May 24 in federal court.

The answer outlines 17 defenses for why the complaint should be dismissed. Among them are claims that the actions of the fire department were privileged and that Lancaster's injuries and damages allegedly sustained were caused by "the sole, concurring or contributory negligence of the plaintiff."

Lancaster is suing for emotional damages along with claims for lost wages and attorney's fees.

"The facts speak for themselves, and they speak volumes," Joyce Smithey, Lancaster's attorney, wrote in an email Tuesday.

Lancaster was ready to return to work in November 2011 after giving birth to her son in October, according to the complaint, though she received an emailed letter of termination from the department's board president Kevin Shiloh.

The Nov. 15, 2011, email stated, "The Employee Board along with the Board of Directors of The Sykesville Freedom District Fire Department regrets to inform you that your employment with the Sykesville-Freedom District Fire Department has been terminated effective November 15, 2011. We however, wish you success in your future endeavors."

Lancaster claims she was never given an explanation for being let go, according to the lawsuit filed April 4 in Carroll County Circuit Court.

The fire department denies any and all allegations regarding improper motive or actions in terminating Lancaster, according to the response.

The department also denied that Lancaster was capable of performing the duties of her position as a firefighter and paramedic, which is alleged in the lawsuit.

The case will now move to the discovery phase and a conference call is scheduled with the court June 20 to determine a scheduling order, according to Schmidt.