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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

## **CURRENT AND FORMER ALLEGHENY COUNTY 9-1-1 EMERGENCY DISPATCHERS FILE SUIT FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT, HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT, AND DISCRIMINATION**

**Pittsburgh, PA, (November 20, 2014)** – Three 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers for the Allegheny County 9-1-1 Call Center (“Call Center”) filed separate suits on November 19, 2014 against the Call Center, located in Downtown Pittsburgh, alleging egregious sexual harassment and blatant discrimination based on gender and race.

All three of the plaintiffs are female and minorities. The three plaintiffs are Kelli Rodriguez (Hispanic), Ruby Helvy (African-American), and Dapree Thompson (African-American). Although these women are filing separate complaints, the complaints all describe a hostile environment of harassment and discrimination coming from the same management and supervisory team. This harassment and lack of support from management severely impacted the ability of the dispatchers to assist emergency callers and emergency services personnel throughout Allegheny County. Emergency dispatchers fulfill an important role in maintaining the safety and well being of the residents of Western Pennsylvania, and the complaints allege shocking violations of the basic rights of these vital public servants.

During Ms. Rodriguez’s time at the Call Center, supervisors repeatedly humiliated her while management refused to take any steps to assist her. Her primary training supervisor, a white male, called her racial slurs, threatened her with physical violence and insulted her in front of her fellow dispatchers. The training supervisor sexually harassed Ms. Rodriguez commenting on how her long hair was “hot as fuck” and inquiring into whether she “liked to fuck niggers.” One of the most disturbing aspects of the harassment was the fact that the supervisor would yell and scream insults in Ms. Rodriguez’ face while she was actively on the phone attempting to assist 9-1-1 emergency callers. This screaming was so bad that callers questioned Ms. Rodriguez about what was going on in the background. Only after a coworker complained on Ms. Rodriguez’s behalf did management take action, first transferring her to another supervisor, then terminating her, further violating her rights.

Ruby Helvy, a nine-year veteran dispatcher for the Call Center, describes how management frequently suspended and punished her for minor infractions while non-minority co-workers were given a slap on the wrist or a sweetheart deal for the same or similar infraction.



Management at the Call Center suspended Ms. Helvy six times in a less than two-year period. Meanwhile, white co-workers were generally suspended for a shorter period of time or not at all for the same infractions. White workers on the late night shift were documented falling asleep on the job yet received no punishment while African-American workers, and especially female African-American workers, had to walk on eggshells and avoid every minor infraction for fear of being suspended.

Dapree Thompson, a ten-year veteran dispatcher for the Call Center, explains in her complaint how she was targeted and treated differently because she is African-American. In one incident Ms. Thompson was called a “nigger” over the phone by emergency services in the field. Management knew of this incident and yet did nothing to identify and punish the perpetrator. The pattern of discrimination against Ms. Thompson continued when she got into a mutual argument with a white co-worker and management suspended her, while the white co-worker was never suspended. Management made Ms. Thompson and other African-American co-workers take calls from the inner city of Pittsburgh because they could “speak ghetto.” Management also reprimanded her for “speaking too fast” when she had been conducting herself in the same manner for fourteen years.

The conduct of the management and personnel at the Allegheny County 9-1-1 Call Center that is described above created a hostile and unacceptable work environment for minority women in a demanding and important job. These dispatchers are trained to help people in the worst of times, as they relay 9-1-1 complaints to the necessary emergency services such as police, paramedics and firefighters. Not only is this despicable treatment of minority women in violation of basic human decency, it also places the greater public good at risk. Management tolerated and participated in screaming at dispatchers while they were taking calls and allowing workers to sleep on the job while emergency telephone calls were coming in to the Call Center. The citizens of Allegheny County rely on these services to keep them safe and it is disgraceful and shocking to hear that such an environment exists at the 9-1-1 Call Center. People’s lives are placed at risk by allowing this conduct to flourish and continue at the 9-1-1 Call Center. All three plaintiffs are seeking damages for lost wages, humiliation and legal fees.

Ms. Rodriguez, Ms. Helvy and Ms. Thompson are represented by Kraemer, Manes & Associates LLC, a Pittsburgh-based law firm focused on representing employees and protecting employee rights. Attorneys on these cases are Joseph D. Pometto and Michael Kraemer.

These cases are filed in the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. Digital copies of the filed complaints are available at [www.lawkm.com/media](http://www.lawkm.com/media).

For more information about these cases, contact Joseph D. Pometto at (412) 613-9323 or at [j@lawkm.com](mailto:j@lawkm.com).

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