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Police Officer Mom Sues City of Los Angeles for Discrimination

Los Angeles, CA – On May 26, Officer Shawna Smith of the Los Angeles Airport Police filed a lawsuit against the City of Los Angeles and two high-ranking police department officials for pregnancy and gender discrimination, for failure to prevent that discrimination, failure to make pregnancy and gender-related job accommodations and for failure to even engage in accommodation-related discussions.

According to the complaint, Officer Smith was abruptly and involuntarily moved to a light-duty assignment simply because she wouldn't participate in weapons-qualifying at the department's indoor range, since she was breastfeeding her newborn child and could not be exposed to high, concentrated levels of lead. Rather than allow Smith to qualify at a nearby outdoor range like many other officers, she was stripped of her patrol duties and buried in a position reserved for injured officers or non-sworn employees.

"Officer Shawna Smith is too important an asset to this department to be wasted behind a desk," says Marshall McClain, President of the L.A. Airport Peace Officers Association. "Smith is a field training officer for new recruits. A seven-year veteran, she is a role model, well-respected and great at her job."

Smith returned from maternity leave in January 2009 and resumed her prior position in patrol and competently performed her duties. However, in March, her assignment was unexpectedly changed from patrol to front desk with duties performed by officers who are either on light-duty due to injury or otherwise unable to perform the functions of their job. Smith was told that the move was brought about because she hadn't qualified on the shooting range for some time. Officer Smith then presented her doctor's instruction that while breastfeeding, she shouldn't be exposed to lead concentrations found in an enclosed firing range. She asked to qualify at an outdoor range but was denied this option and was basically pushed aside to a punitive

reassignment, where according to her complaint; she has been caused significant harm, including loss of current and potential pay and all prospects of promotion.

“The Airport needs good officers keeping the traveling public safe and our agency, like many others, is already short-staffed, so losing a training officer is especially detrimental. Our association is hoping for a quick resolution to this matter since all Smith is asking for is to qualify at an outdoor range. We need her back in patrol.”

The Los Angeles Airport Peace Officers Association, representing 423 sworn police and firefighters, is tasked with protecting all the city’s airports, including LAX, the world’s fifth busiest airport. This association is joined in its support of a fellow officer by other organizations, including La Leche League International, whose mission is to help women worldwide to breastfeed through the encouragement of mothers helping mothers.

Both groups are considering a press conference to better inform the public and community leaders of Shawna Smith’s fight to be both a good mother and a good police officer.

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