

# Age discrimination suit against Harford County Sheriff's Office moves forward

Longtime employee claims she was passed over for job and then demoted

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A longtime crime analyst manager's age discrimination lawsuit against the Harford County Sheriff's Office will proceed after a federal judge denied the employer's motion for summary judgment. Angela Royster claims she was overlooked for a promotion three years ago in favor of a younger, less experienced woman at the sheriff's office. Instead, she was assigned to work at a local detention center, a move she considered a demotion, according to court records. Carl N. Zacarias, an assistant attorney general for the state treasurer's office and lawyer for the defendant,

said "naturally, we disagree with the decision" and referred to previously filed court documents for further comment.

The sheriff's office argues Royster, who has worked in the office for more than 20 years, had a history of butting heads with her supervisors and was unwilling to learn new skills for her job. The defense also accuses Royster of having "muddled" facts and not making claims of age discrimination in any of her notes. Royster also never put her complaints in writing to give to her superiors to investigate, according to the summary judgment motion.

The sheriff's office also argues that Royster cannot prove she was meeting then-Sheriff Jesse Bane's work expectations or that he was aware of the age difference between Royster and Kathleen Mack, the 23-year-old woman who was promoted over Royster, according

to U.S. Magistrate Judge Timothy J. Sullivan's ruling.

Bane previously testified that he worked with Royster in 1995, at which time Mack would have been 5 years old. The former sheriff also received an email in 2013 with Mack's date of birth, further showing he was aware of the age difference between the women, Sullivan wrote in his opinion, filed last week.

Sullivan ruled there is a dispute as to whether Royster was meeting Bane's expectations. However, a July 2014 performance evaluation rated her performance as either "outstanding" or "acceptable" in all aspects, suggesting that Royster was at least performing well enough to keep her job, according to the opinion.

"While Royster's evidence of discrimination and retaliation is by no

means robust, it is not the function of this court to weigh evidence or decide disputed facts when deciding a motion for summary judgment," he wrote.

Bane retired in December 2014. Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler, Bane's successor, is named as the defendant in the lawsuit but Royster has a good relationship with the current office, according to her lawyer, Morris E. Fischer.

The sheriff's office has not indicated it wants to settle the case, added Fischer, a Silver Spring solo practitioner.

Royster is currently working in a detention facility, and her supervisor "doesn't really acknowledge me," she said Thursday. But she added she wants to continue working at the sheriff's office after the case is resolved, she said.

The case is *Royster v. Gahler*, 1:15-cv-01843-TJS.