

Fired After Blowing the Whistle, Veteran Broadcaster Says

EDWARD ERICSON JR May 8, 2018

BALTIMORE, Md. (CN) — Fired last year from Morgan State University, the school's former director of broadcast operations [claims in court](#) that the school has been misreporting its operating expenses for years to pad its funding.

Michele Williams filed the April 26 complaint in Baltimore City Circuit Court with help from attorneys Daniel Kenney and Morris Fischer. She says Morgan State hired her in 2014, and that one of her duties as director of broadcast operations included investigating and certifying the audited financial statements that Morgan State submitted to the federal Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

"If Morgan State University shows a certain levels of operating expenditures to CPB — then Morgan State becomes eligible for a certain level of federal funds through CPB's grant program," the complaint states.

Williams says trouble arose in late 2016, however, when she noticed the university had since 2014 been telling state officials and the CPB that the school's radio station "WEAA had operating expenses of around \$1,000,000 more than its actual expenses."

Williams says she made repeated complaints about her findings and refused to sign off on what she believed was a \$1 million variance in the 2016 numbers.

"Rather than have Plaintiff raise issues about to CPB or the state of Maryland, defendant made the decision to terminate plaintiff," the complaint states.

Williams emphasizes that her "termination coincided with the university's 2016 fiscal year financial statement deadlines so as to exclude plaintiff from the process of creating and submitting financial statements to the state of Maryland and to CPB."

She also claims, however, that tensions had been high since 2016 while the city was gripped by a tight race to elect a replacement for outgoing Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake.

Just as the radio station WEAA had hosted a debate ahead of the Democratic primary that year, Williams says she began organizing a general election debate that would be held in WEAA's studio.

As alleged in the complaint, however, Williams received instructions to cancel the debate some time after it was scheduled because Democratic candidate Catherine Pugh could not attend.

Claiming that this demand evinced a bias on the part of the school dean, Williams says the event would have went on as scheduled "if any other candidate were not available on the day

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of the debate.”

Williams meanwhile scheduled air time for the Republican and Green Party candidates, noting that the Independent candidate had already received air time a few weeks earlier and that “Pugh was [also] offered equal time by the radio station.”

Regardless of this equal treatment, the complaint says the dean threatened that such actions would “not end well” for her.

Williams paired her wrongful-termination allegations with one count of defamation, saying the dean “falsely and publicly accused plaintiff of making expenditures within the radio station that were not actually made – which led plaintiff to ultimately be terminated.”

The complaint seeks punitive damages, lost wages and an injunction, among other relief.

Though a university spokesman declined to comment on the suit, citing school policy for pending litigation, a spokeswoman for CPB confirmed that it makes larger grants to stations that can show they receive more financial support from other sources.

Williams has not responded to a request for comment.

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