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SUNDAY

March 27, 2022 • TelegraphHerald.com • Dubuque, Iowa

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TH exclusive

Kirkendall believes suspension politically motivated

Assistant Dubuque County attorney placed on administrative leave; May denies retaliation.

Telegraph Herald

An assistant Dubuque County attorney was placed on paid administrative leave Friday afternoon, a move he claims is retaliation for filing to challenge the county attorney in the November election.

Richard Kirkendall was notified by County Attorney C.J. May III and County Human Resources Administrator Dawn Sherman that he would be placed on leave and was escorted from the county courthouse in Dubuque just hours after securing a conviction in a trial.

At the conclusion of that four-day trial, a jury convicted a man of attempted murder and domestic assault. Kirkendall was the prosecutor.

"I'm still processing this," Kirkendall said of being placed on leave, noting he was "still getting the details" as to why the punishment was lev-

ied. "It's not a situation I ever thought I'd be in."

May categorically denied that the move had anything to do with Kirkendall's bid for the county attorney seat.

"Mr. Kirkendall's administrative suspension does not concern politics and is not politically motivated," May said. "The administrative suspension involved an internal confidential personnel matter that was issued and is being administered by the Dubuque County Human Resources Department. It is a matter I am not legally able to discuss or comment on at this time."

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Richard Kirkendall



C.J. May III

TH exclusive

Dubuque Fire Department culture to get 'hard look'



Jami Boss, who works for the Dubuque Fire Department, sits at her home in Dubuque on Wednesday. Boss recently

won a civil lawsuit against the City of Dubuque and Fire Chief Rick Steines.

Jury found sexual harassment and discrimination, but trial transcripts, exhibits provide fuller look at issues

BY KAYLI REESE
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When Jami Boss in 2011 moved from the Wausau (Wis.) Fire Department to the Dubuque Fire Department, she didn't expect her workplace experience to radically change.

But Boss endured sexual harassment and discrimination over the past decade in a workplace seemingly geared against women.

"Women are not seen as equal to (men), even when we go to work and do our job every day," Boss said in a recent interview with the Telegraph Herald. "... It's always been hard for me to wrap my head around it because I feel like if you can do the same job as somebody else, there should be the same kind of respect."

Boss sued the City of Dubuque and Fire Chief Rick Steines in September 2020 for sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation. Following an eight-day civil trial in February of this year, a jury found that she proved her claims of sexual harassment and discrimination and awarded her \$575,000.

In the wake of that decision, the Telegraph Herald examined 276 pages of testimony giv-



Jami Boss stands by a Dubuque Fire Department firetruck. She has served in the department since 2011.

en by two high-ranking city officials during the trial and 58 exhibits submitted for it, in addition to its previous reporting on the opening and closing arguments and the lawsuit itself. The newspaper also reached out for follow-up interviews with key members of the department and city staff.

They collectively show a fire department, over the past decade, in which:

- A captain sexually harassed an intern and used his position to scare her, then was allowed to resign rather than be fired.
- The aforementioned intern was scared to report the harassment due to fears of retaliation, while Boss reported retaliation for her role in assisting the intern.

- Other reports of harassment do not appear to have been fully investigated.
- There was talk of not promoting women because they might be harassed by their superiors.
- There were concerns of discrimination in regard to promotions.
- Women did not have a dedicated space for breastfeeding, as required by federal law.
- Some women's bathrooms did not have locks on their doors.
- One fire station had garnered nicknames because pornographic material was so prevalent in it.
- A light switch plate depicting a male flasher, in which the switch was positioned to resemble genitalia, was up for an extended period of time and put back up even after it was taken down.
- A large segment of White men were worried about women or minorities receiving special treatment, despite having very few women in the department and no minorities.
- Boss was told by at least one colleague that she only was hired because she was a woman.

See CULTURE, PAGE 8A



JESSICA REILLY • Telegraph Herald

Bin there, done that

Brianna Finnegan (left), of Dubuque, and Erica Bell, of Farley, Iowa, browse items at the grand opening of DaaBIN Store in Dubuque on Saturday. **Story: Page 7A**

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