

Spielvogel sues Lake Michigan College

Federal lawsuit alleges wrongful termination

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SPIELVOGEL

Spielvogel was hired Nov. 24, 2015, to replace retiring President Robert Harrison. She began working at LMC Jan. 4 under

a contract that was to run through June 30, 2018.

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Former Lake Michigan College President Jennifer Spielvogel is suing LMC and its Board of Trustees for alleged wrongful termination.

Spielvogel's lawyer, Bradley Glazier of the Grand Rapids firm Bos & Glazier, said he filed the lawsuit last Friday in U.S. District Court in Grand Rapids. The case has been assigned to Judge Janet T. Neff.

She was suspended April 8 following a closed session during a special meeting of the board, and was fired May 5 following a termination hearing. The board's vote to fire her was unanimous.

Board trustees cited policy violations, improper conduct, improper management behavior, a lack of profes-

sionalism, providing inadequate goals and incurring \$20,625 in unauthorized costs charged to LMC.

Board Chairwoman Mary Jo Tomasini said at the time that Spielvogel created a hostile environment for some employees and could have placed LMC in jeopardy of lawsuits.

Spielvogel and Glazier called the just-cause hearing "a farce," saying they could not cross examine witness statements from the April 8 meeting that were used as cause to fire her. Spielvogel said notes from that earlier meeting were "twisted to look like (just) cause" and she was not given a chance to refute or correct them.

Harrison is now serving as

president emeritus and acting CEO for the college. He issued the following statement from LMC Tuesday regarding the lawsuit: "The college was just made aware of the lawsuit, but has not been officially served. Based on comments made by her attorney, we expected that a lawsuit would be filed and this does not come as a surprise, but we cannot comment on pending litigation."

Spielvogel's 19-page lawsuit complaint alleges that her firing was a breach of contract and in violation of public policy.

The suit seeks past and future wages and fringe benefits that were lost due to the firing, compensatory damages,

including loss of professional reputation and emotional distress damages, reinstatement to the position or award of front pay and attorney fees, plus other relief deemed appropriate by the court.

In her lawsuit complaint, Spielvogel says she was targeted for termination after she claimed to have found LMC to be out of compliance with U.S. Department of Education rules for financial aid for students. She said she brought her concerns to Tomasini before a March 22 board meeting. Tomasini denied that and said the May 5 just-cause hearing was the first time she or the board had heard about any alleged concerns with financial aid.

After the May 5 hearing, college officials said they dug through financial aid records to ensure everything was in order, and LMC issued a statement regarding 15 years of audit reports and said there is no reason for concern regarding students' financial aid.

LMC spokeswoman Candice Elders said the college has a solid history working with student financial aid programs.

"We are always looking for ways to improve, but we have no reason to believe (Spielvogel's) remarks should cause students, families or employees any concern whatsoever," she said.

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