

Federal suit alleges workplace retaliation under El Paso County Sheriff Elder

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El Paso County Sheriff Bill Elder in a 2015 file photo. (Jerilee Bennett/The Gazette)

A federal lawsuit claims two El Paso County sheriff's employees were targeted with retaliation after reporting a supervisor for sexual harassment.

Former sheriff's Sgt. Keith Duda, who was fired in July, and daughter Caitlyn Duda, a jail guard, say they were singled out after lodging a complaint in November 2016 about a supervisor they say is Sheriff Bill Elder's friend.

That supervisor sought revenge months later by initiating "unwarranted" disciplinary action against Caitlyn Duda for cursing at an inmate, says their 25-page complaint, filed Friday in U.S. District Court in Denver.

When Caitlyn Duda followed up with a new complaint alleging retaliation, sheriff's officials denied her father a promotion, the lawsuit says.

Keith Duda, a 12-year veteran, says he ultimately was terminated. He said the same supervisor harassed him for using personal time to support the candidacy of Mike Angley, who ran an unsuccessful campaign to unseat Elder this year.

The lawsuit names Elder as the sole defendant. Sheriff's spokeswoman Natalie Sosa said Elder does not comment on pending litigation.

The alleged sexual harassment involved a female deputy who is a friend of Caitlyn Duda's.

Keith Duda learned of her allegations at a banquet he attended with her. Afterward, he filed a formal report and also "instructed Caitlyn Duda to report what she knew about the alleged sexual harassment."

According to the complaint, the supervisor in question ultimately received a letter of reprimand finding that he had made at least one lewd comment. He is not named as a defendant.

The lawsuit marks the latest round of allegations over sexual harassment and retaliation in the Sheriff's Office.

In August, former Deputy Patrick Smith, a 13-year-veteran, filed a lawsuit saying he was forced to resign in retaliation for supporting a female deputy's sexual harassment claim. Sheriff's officials said he was terminated for excessive force against an inmate.

It's unclear if Smith's claim involved the same sexual harassment allegation or a separate incident.