

CONTACT

Siegel & Yee
(510) 839-1200
FAX (510) 444-6698
<http://www.siegelyee.com>

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Whistleblower Wins \$613K Verdict against City of Oakland
*Jury Rules that Ex-City Administrator of Oakland Deanna Santana Fired
Ex-Employee Relations Director Lawanna Preston for Disclosing and
Refusing to Participate in Unlawful Acts*

September 24, 2015

SAN FRANCISCO/OAKLAND. Yesterday afternoon a federal jury awarded \$613,302 to Ms. Lawanna Preston, former Employee Relations Director of the City of Oakland. The jury affirmed her claim against the City for termination in retaliation for disclosing and refusing to participate in unlawful acts. Deanna Santana, former City Administrator of Oakland and now City Administrator of Sunnyvale, made the decision to terminate her.

In early 2012, Ms. Preston refused Santana's order to approve a report on the Rainbow Teen Center if it included language recommending criminal charges against Councilmember Desley Brooks. Brooks spearheaded the teen center in her district, in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Oakland. The criminal charges would have targeted Brooks, the only African American woman on the Council, although other Council members had admitted to similar acts to those Brooks was accused of. Ms. Preston believed this was racially discriminatory.

In June 2013, Ms. Preston told Santana that the Oakland Fire Chief Teresa Reed had agreed to an extension of a term in the Firefighters' Union contract, without Council approval. This was a violation of both City rules and state law under the Meyers-Milias-Brown Act, which controls public agency negotiations. Reed testified that Santana instructed her to enter this agreement.

Finally, on October 1, 2013, Ms. Preston defied Santana's order to conceal from the City Council the fact that the City had been failing to collect union dues from part time employees who were members of the Service Employees International Union. Less than forty hours later, Santana fired Ms. Preston, recording only that the termination was for "lack of work."

Other political heavy weights took the stand in favor of Ms. Preston. Longtime California Assembly member Sandre Swanson, and current California Senate candidate, testified to Ms. Preston's excellent work as Employee Relations Director. Phillip Lamont Ewell, former Oakland City Administrator, a former Fire Chief, and City Administrator of other cities for decades, also testified to Ms. Preston's outstanding job performance. Fred Blackwell, president of San Francisco Foundation, testified to the same.

Dan Siegel and Sonya Z. Mehta of Siegel & Yee, a civil rights firm that has advocated for workers and other civil rights for decades, represented Ms. Preston.

For interviews, contact Dan Siegel or Sonya Z. Mehta of Siegel & Yee at (510)839-1200.