

Friday, May 2, 2008

# O.C. Fair Housing Council board alleges director harassed employees

A judge sets a May 19 hearing on new accusation against D. Elizabeth Pierson.

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The Orange County Register

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SANTA ANA - The director of the Fair Housing Council of Orange County is accused of violating a court order by harassing employees who are cooperating with the nonprofit's investigation into allegations of mismanagement and misuse of public funds.

The new accusation against D. Elizabeth Pierson – which came up in court Friday -- indicates that she is interfering in the probe, said the board's attorney Deborah Reisdorph.

A judge Friday agreed to schedule a May 19 hearing on the matter.

Pierson -- who began working for the agency in 1991 and became executive director eight years ago -- is being sued by the nonprofit's board for allegedly hindering the investigation, which stemmed from complaint letters the board received about Pierson's management style. One ex-employee alleged an employee falsified files under Pierson's watch and that Pierson is often away from the office.

Last month, a commissioner curtailed Pierson's control of the agency, including ordering her not to interfere in the probe.

On Friday, Reisdorph declined to elaborate on the board's allegation that Pierson is harassing employees.

Pierson's attorney, Steven Platt, disputed the board's contention that Pierson is interfering in the probe.

"The recent action (by the board) is a further attempt to harass Ms. Pierson," he said. "There is no evidence period that she is interfering ... She has done nothing but to run a successful agency."

The litigation has concerned some cities enough to pull back from the agency. Mission Viejo has opted out of Fair Housing's services and opted to contract with its Long Beach counterpart, and Fullerton is waiting until the lawsuit ends before paying the organization for services.

Wayne Ward, the board's director, could not be reached for comment. But Reisdorph said the board wants to assure cities that the lawsuit will not distract the agency from its work.

An unrelated hearing in the case is scheduled for Monday.

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