



Media Alert

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BENNY N. NAPOLEON
Sheriff

Contact: Paula Bridges 313.354.5223

For immediate release

WAYNE COUNTY JURY DENIES WHISTLEBLOWER CLAIM

Panel supports Sheriff Napoleon's decision to fire employee who violated policies.

(August 14, 2014) Detroit— After two weeks of testimony from nearly two dozen witnesses, it only took jurors a few hours to uphold Sheriff Benny N. Napoleon's firing of a former employee who sued Wayne County and the Sheriff's Office under the Whistleblower Protection Act.

The disgruntled employee alleged in a civil complaint she was fired in May 2012 in retaliation for informing the Sheriff and other command executives that Director of Jails Jeriel Heard had improperly hired a woman she alleged was related to Heard.

However, jurors heard through taped audio recordings and witness testimony that former employee Renee Newell violated WCSO policies forbidding direct or indirect contact with inmates, failed to notify executives of her brother's incarceration (another policy violation), violated phone policies, and committed other acts that compromised her role as the Director of Compliance. Sheriff Benny N. Napoleon said the decision to fire Newell was not easy, but necessary when it comes to securing the jails.

"We've always maintained it was proper, especially since I have fired some 18 other individuals who violated the same policies against fraternization," said Sheriff Benny N. Napoleon. "It is crucial that we maintain the highest levels of security in our jails and I applaud the jurors for scrutinizing the evidence and denying her claims."

Assistant Wayne County Corporation Counsel Cheryl Yappo, Megan Prost and James Surowiec argued the case before Third Circuit Court Judge David Allen. Atty. Surowiec said preparing for the trial was extremely tedious but worth the legwork given the outcome.

"This was an extremely serious matter because not only was she alleging Whistleblower violations, she and her lawyers insinuated several conspiracies that were just not true," said Atty. Surowiec. "We were pleased the jury saw through that and reached the verdict that was favorable to the Sheriff."

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