

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**GARBARVILLE SANITARY DISTRICT FACING MAJOR LITIGATION FOR  
RETALIATORY FIRING OF A WHISTLEBLOWER.**

On June 5, 2017, long time District employee Tina Stillwell was terminated by General Manager Ralph Emerson after she disclosed to the District's auditor that she believed he had engaged in financial improprieties. Her concerns included billing the GSD for equipment purchases the General Manager made for another sanitation district for which he also works, and "double dipping" by being paid by the GSD when he was also doing work for his other employer.

The auditor was apparently pressured by the General Manager not to submit her report detailing those findings. But the final report contained findings and recommendations consistent with Ms. Stillwell's disclosures.

When the General Manager learned that Ms. Stillwell was the source of these disclosures he retaliated. He fired her using groundless, stale, unfounded allegations of poor work performance. Ms. Stillwell had worked for more than 7 years for the District and had helped countless members of the community resolve rate payment issues providing a long-term community member's honest and direct assistance to the ratepayers. She had enjoyed a reputation in the community as a dedicated hard worker. She stated:

"I am just devastated by the loss of the job I loved. It was a privilege serving my community in that capacity, now I am facing enormous financial hardship and embarrassment by my firing. I simply felt compelled to report the General Manager's apparent wrongdoing through the proper channels and expected the Board to approve such transparency – instead they have allowed him to retaliate against me in the most hurtful way,"

Ms. Stillwell has retained San Francisco attorney Kenneth C. Absalom to represent her. Herb Schwartz has been retained as her mediation consultant. Mr. Absalom has long experience representing wronged workers, including winning a substantial verdict some years ago from a Eureka jury for a client who had been discriminated against by his employer.

The Board of Directors is meeting in closed door session on September 9<sup>th</sup> to consider the claims Ms. Stillwell has made. Today Ken Absalom sent a letter to the Board inviting them to participate in pre-litigation mediation in an effort to resolve this dispute amicably, and before the District incurs what promises to be significant expenses and damages if Ms. Stillwell prevails in her whistleblower lawsuit.

Attorney Absalom offered to get mediation done within 30 days if the District is willing to accept that approach, otherwise the case will proceed to a civil lawsuit.

[Questions may be directed to the Law Offices of Kenneth C. Absalom at 415-392-5040 or via email to [Kenasbalom@333law.com](mailto:Kenasbalom@333law.com)]