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Bexar County begins settling lawsuits with Pct. 2 deputies targeted by Barrientes Vela

County settled 2019 federal suit that called ex-constable 'poster child of government done wrong'

Dillon Collier, Investigative Reporter

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Barrientes Vela faces judge after turning self in on felony charges



SAN ANTONIO – Bexar County has begun settling lawsuits with both former and current Precinct 2 deputies targeted during Michelle Barrientes Vela’s nearly three years in office, multiple officials confirmed Thursday.

Former Precinct 2 Deputy Josh Ruiz will receive in excess of \$120,000 as part of an out-of-court settlement, his federal employment attorney said.

Ruiz sued Bexar County in December 2019, claiming that Barrientes Vela “took deliberate, calculated measures to reshape the department into a cadre of young, inexperienced loyalist deputies and rid herself of older, senior and more experienced officers when she was not otherwise engaging in chicanery such as charging the county for training exercises that she did not attend.”

The suit, which alleged age discrimination violations, referred to Barrientes Vela as “the poster child of government done wrong” and said she forced out the 16-year veteran of Precinct 2 after being required to trim staff.

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“Where Constable Vela should have released one of the three new hires so as to protect Deputy Ruiz’s position – a senior, decorated officer – per the county’s de facto practice of ‘last hired, first released’ customarily observed in most work environments, she chose youth and inexperience to seniority, experience and an established track record. Significantly, all of the three newly hires were on a probationary period and were at-will, but instead of removing one of her newly hand-picked hires, she targeted Deputy Ruiz as the fall guy for her ill-advised hiring spree,” the suit states.

WATCH: ‘Downfall:’ The story of ex-Constable Michelle Barrientes Vela, a KSAT 12 Defenders special

“Curiously, Constable Vela then did something astonishing: she wrote a letter of recommendation recognizing his contributions and achievements within the office and then quickly did an about face lambasting him as an unfit officer within her department, upon learning he had filed an EEOC charge of discrimination on the basis of age. Despite Constable Vela’s best constructed and manufactured newly asserted grounds for urging his removal due to his allegedly illustrious disciplinary record as a deputy, the same are self-effacing and implode. On one hand she claims he violated the department’s policies on no less than three separate counts but proceeds to tell Mr. Overstreet, with the Fire Marshall’s (sic) office that he had no disciplinary issues, upon seeking a reference of his performance as a former deputy,” the suit also states.

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An attorney representing Bexar County in the case confirmed Thursday afternoon the Ruiz suit has been resolved and dismissed.

The attorney representing the county also acknowledged Thursday that other suits filed by Precinct 2 deputies Leonicio Moreno and Chris De La Cerda have proceeded through mediation and agreements have been reached, but that the settlement details have not yet been finalized.

Moreno and De La Cerda, frequent targets of Barrientes Vela, were both reinstated to Precinct 2 shortly **after Barrientes Vela was removed from office in October 2019.**

Barrientes Vela's replacement, Constable Leticia Vazquez, has since elevated Moreno and De La Cerda to supervisory positions within her office.

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Moreno and De La Cerda's 2019 federal suit against Barrientes Vela accuses the then-constable of unfairly targeting them after Moreno filed to run against her in the 2020 election.

The suit also claims that Moreno was falsely imprisoned after being taken into custody on allegations of aggravated perjury in late April 2019.

WATCH: Precinct 2 deputies delayed booking of constable's political opponent

Prosecutors dismissed the charge within hours of Moreno's arrest and a subsequent investigation by the KSAT 12 Defenders revealed the two deputy constables who took Moreno into custody delayed booking him for nearly a half-hour until the media could arrive.

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Barrientes Vela, who was indicted last year on one felony count of aggravated perjury, two felony counts of tampering with evidence and three misdemeanor counts of official oppression, is currently free on bond awaiting trial on the perjury charge.

She made a virtual court appearance Wednesday and is scheduled to appear in court in person for a pretrial hearing May 21.

Barrientes Vela's trial could take place later this summer.

Her former captain, Marc D. Garcia, is also free on bond awaiting trial for felony perjury.

His next court appearance is scheduled for early August.

Garcia also faces three counts of official oppression, a Class A misdemeanor.

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Emmy-award winning reporter Dillon Collier joined the KSAT 12 Defenders in 2016. Dillon's investigative stories air weeknights on the Nightbeat. He provides restaurant health reports for KSAT's "Behind the Kitchen Door." Dillon is a two-time Houston Press Club Journalist of the Year and a Texas Associated Press Broadcasters Reporter of the Year.

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