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Allegations of paramedic's "joy riding" prompt lawsuit

By JON FRANK, The Virginian-Pilot

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VIRGINIA BEACH - A paramedic working for the city is suing a public school teacher, claiming that the teacher made libelous claims about her in letters to the paramedic's boss.

The three letters, dated May 1, May 8 and June 1, claim that the paramedic had an adulterous affair with a rescue squad volunteer, and that the paramedic gave carnival-like "joy rides" in her squad car to neighborhood children, according to the lawsuit.

The case was filed in Circuit Court earlier this month. It asserts that the letters damaged the reputation of paramedic Susan McClelland.

The lawsuit alleges that the letters were sent to McClelland's boss - Bruce W. Edwards, director of the city's Department of Emergency

Medical Services - by Kathleen

Whiteside, a teacher at Princess Anne Middle School.

The lawsuit says the letters have damaged McClelland's reputation and were written with the knowledge that the allegations were false or with reckless disregard as to whether they were false.

The lawsuit seeks \$150,000 in compensatory damages plus \$350,000 in punitive damages.

The two women are not strangers. Whiteside said she is dating McClelland's former husband. McClelland's attorney confirmed the relationship.

The letters were sent anonymously. McClelland's attorney, Melinda F. Seemar, said she has corroborating evidence that Whiteside wrote the letters.

Whiteside's attorney, Robert Travers, said, "We vigorously deny the allegations made in the lawsuit and we will be vigorously defending this case."

Whiteside denied writing the letters. In a telephone interview Thursday, she said, "I am totally blind sided by this whole thing."

The letters allege that McClelland picked up children at the bus stop and raced with them in her car "up and down Nimmo Parkway with lights flashing."

"She was giving rides to the kids at the bus station like they do rides at the carnival," one letter says.

The lawsuit alleges that Whiteside, in the May 1 letter, claimed that paramedics in Virginia Beach "are living an environment analogous to a modern day brothel. Many are having adulterous affairs both on and off duty. ... One recent incident involved a paid paramedic (Susan McClelland) and a volunteer."

Bill Kiley, deputy chief of the Virginia Beach EMS, said McClelland is one of 32 full-time paramedics hired by EMS in the past two years.

He said he is familiar with the letters and that EMS investigated the allegations and found them to be without substance.

Kiley said EMS prohibits its members from giving "joy rides" to the public.

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