

Attorney Blasts Firing From BP Settlement Program

Michael Kunzelman, Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — An attorney who was fired by the court-supervised administrator of BP's [settlement](#) [1] with Gulf Coast businesses and residents is demanding to be reinstated with back pay.

In a letter to claims administrator Patrick Juneau last Friday, Christine Reitano's lawyer said her contract for working on the settlement program was "wrongfully and improperly" terminated.

Reitano's husband, [Lionel Sutton III](#) [2], also worked as an attorney for the program before resigning in June. In July, U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier appointed former FBI Director Louis Freeh to investigate allegations that Sutton received a portion of settlement proceeds for claims he referred to a law firm before joining Juneau's staff.

Reitano's lawyer, Mary Olive Pierson, said her client severed ties to anyone with BP claims before working for Juneau and hasn't taken any steps to assist those claimants or received any referral fees for the claims.

In her letter, Pierson asked Juneau why Reitano was fired for an unspecified "cause" when there is no evidence "even in your wildest imagination" that she did anything wrong.

"I will not permit Ms. Reitano to be collateral damage in the gunfight at the O.K. Corral between the claims administrator, (plaintiffs' attorneys) and BP," Pierson told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Nick Gagliano, a spokesman for Juneau, said he couldn't comment on Reitano's demand because it was a "personnel issue."

Freeh interviewed Reitano and Sutton at the federal courthouse in New Orleans on July 29, according to Pierson and Sutton's lawyer, Michael Walsh.

"She answered all of the questions truthfully and accurately and provided him with some documentation that he was not aware of," Pierson said.

Walsh said Freeh's interview of Sutton lasted about seven hours. Sutton "cooperated fully" and expects to be vindicated "because he hasn't done anything wrong at all," Walsh added.

Earlier this month, BP asked Barbier for a second time to temporarily suspend all settlement payments until Freeh completes his investigation. Barbier rejected the

Attorney Blasts Firing From BP Settlement Program

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

same request last month, but BP said it only recently learned of new evidence of "more widespread and potentially systemic improprieties" in the settlement program.

BP said at least two lawyers who have ruled on appeals of disputed settlement awards were partners at Louisiana law firms that have represented claimants and filed claims of their own for the firms to be compensated. Pierson questioned why Juneau, after learning of those alleged conflicts in interest, apparently asked the appeals panelists to resign from their firms and didn't fire them.

"I am not at all sure of the reason for the unequal treatment of Ms. Reitano," Pierson wrote. She asked Juneau to provide her with information about the racial and gender makeup of the pool of appeals panelists.

Pierson said her client had nearly a year left on her contract with Juneau's office when she was fired on June 26. In a letter to a BP official dated Aug. 1, Pierson said the company is legally obligated to cover her client's legal expenses while she fights her firing.

Source URL (retrieved on 02/26/2015 - 8:26pm):

http://www.impomag.com/news/2013/08/attorney-blasts-firing-bp-settlement-program?qt-most_popular=0

Links:

[1] <http://www.impomag.com/news/2013/02/billions-stake-bp-gulf-oil-spill-trial>

[2] <http://www.impomag.com/news/2013/06/bp-wants-independent-probe-claims-attorney>