

# Guidance counselor successfully challenges school district because of supervisor's sexual harassment

**Despite statutory limitations on recovery from state agencies, claimant reaches a substantial settlement.**

Mary Siegel (not her real name) had worked for a Florida school district for over 23 years. For the last nine years, she worked as a middle school guidance counselor and had earned an exemplary performance record. She truly loved her job and looked forward to work every day.

In January 2013, the school's assistant principal, David Baker (not his real name), began making unwanted sexual advances towards Mary. He made inappropriate comments and told her that he found her attractive. She tried to rebuff his advances, and reminded him that they were both married and that she had no interest in a relationship with him. He soon began visiting her office, unannounced and with little official purpose. On several occasions he tried to grope her, completely disregarding her pleas for him to stop. He was her direct supervisor, and a powerful figure at the school, and Mary was terrified that if she reported him she would be fired. Eventually, she could not remain silent and she called the school's police force. When confronted, Mr. Baker did not deny the allegations and described his behavior as "just one of those things." He was given the option of resigning or being terminated. He chose to resign.



The stress of the harassment and resulting embarrassment took its toll on Mary. She took leave from her job and sought therapy. She was diagnosed with anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression. After much discussion with her husband and family, Mary sought advice from SDSBS attorney **Andrea Robinson**. They filed a sexual harassment case against the assistant principal's employer, the school district. Despite statutory sovereign immunity limits of \$200,000 on recoveries from state agencies, Mary was able to secure a substantial settlement to resolve the case without filing suit.

Mary has since returned to work as a guidance counselor and is again working with middle school children. She continues her therapy and looks forward to working with the school district until retirement. ♦

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