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## **Five Former SDA Employees File Federal Lawsuit Claiming Political Discrimination**

*NJSDA is accused of firing longtime employees in order to hire political supporters.*

Five former employees of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority filed a lawsuit in federal court today alleging they were illegally fired to make room for the hiring of dozens of political patrons of CEO, Lizette Delgado Polanco and the Democratic Party. Governor Murphy appointed Delgado Polanco as CEO of the SDA last summer. Within weeks of her appointment, the plaintiffs and approximately 25 other SDA employees were fired without notice or cause. Many of the fired employees were simply told after many years of service: "We don't need you anymore."



Partner Daniel Sweetser

The plaintiffs' attorney, Daniel Sweetser of Szaferman, Lakind, Blumstein & Blader in Lawrenceville, New Jersey explained that it is illegal and a violation of his clients' constitutional right to free speech for the government to fire them for political reasons. Sweetser has successfully litigated several political affiliation discrimination cases, including a similar case against the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency in 2002 that resulted in \$1.25 million settlement in favor of Sweetser's clients.

The lawsuit makes claims pursuant to the United States Constitution and the New Jersey State Constitution. In addition, two of the plaintiffs allege a violation of New Jersey's whistleblower law as they were selected to be fired for recent complaints of unlawful activity to SDA management. Sweetser explained that the New Jersey Conscientious Employee Protection Act also known as "CEPA" protects employees from retaliation for objecting to or reporting unlawful employment activity. Sweetser said that if the SDA selected his two clients to be fired because they complained about activity that they reasonably believed to be unlawful, then the SDA violated CEPA in addition to violating their constitutional rights.

Sweetser's clients are seeking damages to compensate them for lost income, lost pension and benefits and other losses permitted by law. The complaint also seeks attorneys' fees and the costs that will be incurred to prosecute the lawsuit. Sweetser said: "Our clients are good people. They were long-standing and hardworking employees of the SDA who went to work every day and did a good job. They deserved better than to be fired simply because the new CEO and her political party wanted to find jobs for their own political supporters. The SDA must be held accountable to our clients for its blatant violation of the law."

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