

City Council Approves Settlement In Filner Harassment Case

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By City News Service



Photo by Christopher Maue

San Diego City Attorney Jan Goldsmith stands at a podium, while Benelia Santos-Hunter, second from the left, stands in the background, at a press conference announcing a settlement in Santos-Hunter's case against former San Diego Mayor Bob Filner, Feb. 2, 2016.

The San Diego City Council Tuesday unanimously approved a \$667,000 settlement in a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by former San Diego Mayor Bob Filner's executive assistant.

The deal scrubbed a trial that had been scheduled to begin in San Diego Superior Court stemming from the suit brought by Benelia Santos-Hunter, who worked for Filner for eight months.

The payout is the largest of four settlements related to the disgraced former mayor and onetime congressman.

"There was compelling evidence that she was a victim of sexual advancement over that time," said City Attorney Jan Goldsmith, who added that the harassment "occurred on a continuous basis."

According to her court papers, Filner harassed Santos-Hunter by kissing her on the forehead, staring into her eyes and asking if she realized how beautiful she was.

On Valentine's Day 2013, Filner tried to hug and kiss her without her consent, and said things like "You need me as your lover" and "Be my Valentine," according to her complaint.

The suit accused the former mayor of other misconduct, including locking Santos-Hunter in a room, placing her in what became known as the "Filner headlock," touching her buttocks and attempting to touch her breasts.

Santos-Hunter, who attended a news conference where the details of the settlement were announced, tearfully thanked the family, friends and ex- colleagues who supported her.

"It was very, very difficult to speak up, but it was the right thing to do," Santos-Hunter said.

She said she thought about quitting during her ordeal, but needed the job.

Filner took office in December 2012, but his administration began to unravel the following summer [amid allegations](#) of various types of misconduct, including sexual harassment.

According to the city attorney, the allegations prompted an investigation, which is when Filner's behavior toward Santos-Hunter was discovered. He said the two were in adjoining offices separated by a door, with daily interactions between them.

The city previously settled two other lawsuits and a claim involving the ex-mayor, who now lives in Los Angeles.

His mayoral communications chief, Irene McCormick Jackson, settled for \$250,000.

Two women, who sought the former congressman's help with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs accepted a \$99,000 payout. Michelle Tyler and Katherine Ragazzino alleged that he sought sexual favors in exchange for his assistance.

A woman who provided city assistance to seniors, Peggy Shannon, settled in exchange for an official apology and a proclamation of "Peggy Shannon Day" in the city.

Last month, a state appellate court ruled that a claim by Jeri Dynes, who alleged that Filner touched her buttocks at an event for dog owners in May 2013, was filed too late.

Two lawsuits, each involving a single incident, remain unresolved, according to Goldsmith.

Filner — who resigned in August 2013 — admitted in court in December 2013 that he grabbed and fondled three women while in office and was sentenced to three years probation, along with three months home detention. He [recently told](#) the online publication Voice of San Diego that he "never sexually harassed anybody."

Original Article: <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2016/feb/02/city-council-approves-settlement-filner-harassment/>