

## One sorority problem is solved, another isn't

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News

A judge dismissed a lawsuit to oust the leadership of the nation's oldest black Greek-letter sorority, including its president, former Chicago Housing Authority financial executive Barbara A. McKinzie. But the Chicago-based organization is headed for trial in a wrongful-termination lawsuit filed by a former staffer who said she was fired for questioning spending and alerting state authorities.

Eight members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. sued in June to remove McKinzie, claiming she misappropriated millions of dollars in AKA money, using some of it to pay for a wax statue of herself in a Baltimore museum. They also claimed she arranged for a \$4,000 monthly stipend to be paid to her after she leaves the traditionally unpaid office. Her four-year term ends this year.

In her ruling Monday in Washington, D.C., Superior Court Judge Natalia M. Combs Greene criticized the plaintiffs for making "hyperbolic allegations riddled with buzzwords."

"Throughout her tenure, Barbara McKinzie has led Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. with the utmost integrity and professionalism, and this ruling reaffirms that very fact," said Dale Cooter, attorney for McKinzie.

Plaintiffs' attorney Edward W. Gray Jr. said his clients are reviewing their options.

Meanwhile, the case is still on for a Chicago woman who said she lost her job as meetings director at AKA's Stony Island Avenue headquarters in June for refusing to sign off on McKinzie's expenditures, then complaining to the state's attorney general's office.

Cook County Judge Ronald Bartkowicz recently denied the sorority's request that the wrongful-termination suit be dismissed.

AKA, which has 60,000 paid members, has until Feb. 22 to answer allegations that it fired Kenitra Shackelford-Johnson within a week of her e-mailing a complaint to the attorney general's office last June. In August, the sorority denied any wrongdoing, saying Shackelford-Johnson resigned.

"We have every intention of going forward with this case and don't see any reason why it won't go to trial," said Ruth Major, the lawyer representing Shackelford-Johnson.

McKinzie -- former chief financial officer of the Cook County Forest Preserve District -- hasn't shied away from the spotlight, appearing at the National Urban League 2009 conference in Chicago and addressing a packed Regal Theater to tout a partnership with Coca-Cola Co. during a Sprite Step Off competition last month.

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