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Caregiver for Disabled People Sues New York State

By **DANNY HAKIM**

ALBANY — A New York State-employed caregiver for people with developmental disabilities sued the state on Monday, accusing it of retaliating against him for whistle-blowing.

The employee, Jeffrey Monsour, has brought to light a number of questionable practices by the state, as varied as routinely falsifying fire drills and turning a blind eye toward abuse of those in the state's system of care for people with developmental disabilities. He was one of the people interviewed and featured in a 2011 series of articles by The New York Times examining problems of abuse and corruption within the system.

Since then, the state has pursued a tenuous disciplinary case against Mr. Monsour, and it also tried to pressure the State Senate to disinvite him from a panel discussion. In an editorial last year, The Times Union of Albany criticized the state for its “muzzling” of Mr. Monsour.

His lawsuit, filed in federal court for the Northern District of New York, names the state's Office for People With Developmental Disabilities as a defendant, as well as one of the office's senior officials, Cathy LaBarge. James Introne, a top aide to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo who oversees the agency, is also named as a defendant.

The suit seeks damages that would be determined at trial.

Matt Wing, a spokesman for the governor, said, “We will review the complaint when we get it.”

Among other things, the suit claims that an unusual memo was inserted into Mr. Monsour's personnel file, which falsely claimed he had been accused of “abuse.” The suit also relates a number of attempts to discipline Mr. Monsour; in one episode, he was investigated for allowing a resident of a group home to share a small amount of eggplant Parmesan with his mother, who was visiting.

The suit also says Mr. Monsour raised concerns after being directed to take a group of offenders with developmental disabilities to a Halloween party at a local theme park where children would be present.

“Instead of embracing Mr. Monsour and taking action to investigate and reform



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system, O.P.W.D.D. decided to tarnish his stellar reputation and make him the target of its reprisals," Mr. Monsour's lawyer, Robert W. Sadowski, said.