



Suit claims Hudson County refused to reassign pregnant worker who later suffered miscarriage

Published: Thursday, July 26, 2012, 3:05 PM Updated: Friday, July 27, 2012, 8:22 AM



Terrence T. McDonald/The Jersey Journal

By



Reena Rose Sibayan/The Jersey Journal

Yvonne Coleman Davis, a Hudson County corrections officer, suffered a miscarriage of one of her twins after she claims her superiors refused to reassign her.

A Jersey City mother who works for the Hudson County Department of Corrections is suing the county in federal court, claiming her superiors refused to keep her away from prisoners during her "high-risk" pregnancy.

Yvonne Coleman-Davis, a corrections officer who works an overnight shift, eventually miscarried one of the twins she was carrying.

After the miscarriage, but while she was six months pregnant with the twin who survived, Coleman-Davis was kicked in the stomach by a female prisoner, and she was required to fill out paperwork before her superiors allowed her to go to the hospital, according to the lawsuit.

Coleman-Davis, who declined to provide her age, said she believes her DOC supervisors declined to reassign her because they were biased in favor of another, more junior employee. She is seeking unspecified damages, and hopes for a change in the way the county deals with pregnant workers.

"It's not monetary," she said. "I just wish they implement a policy to be fairer to all female officers."

Coleman-Davis became pregnant with twins when she was 41, in the spring of 2010. Her lawsuit says she has a history of ectopic pregnancy, miscarriages and other physical ailments, adding that she asked her superiors to reassign her once she learned she was pregnant.

At the time, one of her duties included strip-searching female patients in a small shower stall as they arrived at Hudson County Jail. The lawsuit says the prisoners are "in various conditions and stages of health, cleanliness, drug use and hostility" as they are being searched.

But her superiors refused to change her duties, and in April she miscarried, losing one of the twins, according to the suit. When she returned to work in early July, her duties remained the same, while other workers without health problems were able to work without interaction with inmates, the suit reads.

On July 20, 2010, while six months pregnant, she intervened in a fight between two inmates, and she was pushed against a metal bunk bed, causing injuries. One of the inmates then kicked her in the stomach.

"I was horrified," Coleman-Davis told The Jersey Journal. "All I was thinking was, I was going to lose that baby. I lost one, and now I'm going to lose the other one."

She did not return to work until after her daughter Veronica was born on Oct. 28.

Her troubles did not end with the birth of her child. When she returned to the jail, according to the lawsuit, the county refused to provide a room for her to express milk while she was nursing.

President Obama's healthcare overhaul requires employers with more than 50 workers to provide such a space, but county officials contend they don't have to provide the room because "there's no state law that required" it, according to Coleman-Davis' suit.

"She was compelled to purchase milk for her infant's sustenance because of the county actions ... she was unable to exercise her choice on how to best nurture her child in her first year of life," the lawsuit reads.

© 2012 NJ.com. All rights reserved.