

As Cuomo Hires More Women, Ex-Senior Official Is Accused of Assault

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The timing of a lawsuit comes at a somewhat awkward time for Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who has been appointing women, like Melissa DeRosa, above, to high positions. Ms. DeRosa was named secretary to the governor in April and is the first woman to hold the position.
Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times

A former senior official appointed by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo who resigned recently has been accused by a former state employee of sexual harassment and assault, according to a lawsuit filed in Federal District Court in Manhattan over the weekend.

The former aide, Sam Hoyt, a former Democratic assemblyman from Buffalo, had been the regional president of the state's Empire State Development Corporation. After he quit unexpectedly last month, a woman [told The Buffalo News](#), on the condition of anonymity, that Mr. Hoyt had paid \$50,000 to buy her silence.

But on Saturday, the woman, Lisa Marie Cater, shed her anonymity in [an interview with The New York Post](#). She also filed a lawsuit against Mr. Hoyt, and claimed that Mr. Cuomo and the governor's office had been "deliberately indifferent" toward her

complaints.

In a statement, Mr. Cuomo's counsel, Alphonso David, strongly rebutted Ms. Cater's claims as "patently and demonstrably false," noting that the state had launched three separate investigations into the matter, which remain open, but that she had refused to cooperate. "We expect this matter to be summarily dismissed."

But the timing of the lawsuit is somewhat awkward for Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, who [created a Women's Equality Party](#) during his 2014 re-election campaign. At a time when gender politics and allegations of sexual misconduct are roiling the nation, the governor, who is viewed as a possible presidential contender in 2020, has appointed more women to top positions.

And, in a move that administration officials said was planned well before any of the recent revelations about Mr. Hoyt, Mr. Cuomo is expected to announce on Monday the appointment of Cathy Calhoun as his director of state operations, a top post in the executive chamber.

Ms. Calhoun, 53, has been the acting commissioner of the state's Department of Transportation since August, and her background could help Mr. Cuomo with one of the biggest headaches of his current term — the deterioration of New York City's subway system, which was the subject of a [New York Times investigation](#) this weekend.

Last week, Mr. Cuomo brought on Linda Lacewell, a former federal prosecutor, as his chief of staff. She had been his special counsel when he was the state attorney general. And in April, he appointed Melissa DeRosa to the loftiest job in his inner circle — secretary to the governor. His press secretary, Dani Lever, and his executive deputy secretary, Jill DesRosiers, are also women.

"I can't recall that number of top staffers being women," said Gerald Benjamin, a professor of political science at the State University of New York at New Paltz. "He's appointing very capable people who are women."

Mr. Cuomo appointed Mr. Hoyt in 2011, three years after Mr. Hoyt [admitted](#) that he had had an affair with an intern.

Ms. Cater, 51, said in her complaint that when she emailed the Empire State Development Corporation in October of 2015 to get housing assistance, Mr. Hoyt, to her surprise, contacted her directly and offered to get her a job. Their interactions soon became flirtatious, she said in the complaint, but also intimidating, as Mr. Hoyt, 55, claimed that he was close to the governor and "was in charge of patronage

positions in New York State.”

Mr. Hoyt began to pepper her with texts, every day, at all hours of the day, for weeks, according to the complaint. After she was informed that she had gotten a job at the state Department of Motor Vehicles in February of 2016 with “no interview or application process,” Mr. Hoyt sent a nude photo of himself. Then, according to the complaint, he asked her, “Do you think I look tan?”

At one point, according to the complaint, Mr. Hoyt groped her “crotch area, squeezing as hard as he could and hurting the plaintiff.” He then told her, “You know this is what I want!” the complaint said. Ms. Cater has since left her state job.

In a statement, Terrence M. Connors, a lawyer for Mr. Hoyt, said that Mr. Hoyt had acknowledged a short-term, consensual relationship with Ms. Cater, but “these new allegations are totally inconsistent with her original story and contradicted by her own email and text message correspondence. If she persists with this lawsuit, we will seek dismissal at the earliest stage.”

Ms. Cater also said in the complaint that after she was harassed by Mr. Hoyt, she contacted Noreen VanDoren, a lawyer with the governor’s office. Ms. Cater claimed Ms. VanDoren dismissed her complaints and said, “What is that you want, money?”

But Ms. VanDoren works for the state Office of General Services, not the governor’s office, state records show. Mr. David also said that Ms. VanDoren had been handling Ms. Cater’s request for additional leave because of injuries resulting from a cat bite on her right hand.

“Any allegation that anyone offered the complainant a bribe is divorced from reality,” Mr. David said.

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