



## Ex-Ringwood Police Department dispatcher claims discrimination in lawsuit

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A former dispatcher for the Ringwood Police Department is suing the borough for discrimination, alleging that she was terminated while she was on disability leave.

Barbara Ficken, 52, said in a lawsuit filed in Superior Court in Paterson that she suffered from “various serious, chronic orthopedic and neurological health conditions” that constitute a physical disability that required her to take time off from work for treatment.

Ficken, who lives in West Milford, worked as a dispatcher from November 1997 to December 2013, and said in her lawsuit that she had taken disability leave at various times since 2003.

The department was repeatedly notified about her condition and was provided with doctors’ notes, Ficken said.

In August 2013, Ficken submitted medical notes to her employer to show that she was required to be on medical leave until the following month, she said, and later obtained a note from a doctor who recommended that her leave be extended until January 2014.

Ficken said she also applied for disability benefits under a private insurance plan maintained by the borough that would provide for a six-month disability leave. She was never told by her employer that there was any deficiency in her paperwork, she said.

She was terminated on Dec. 18, 2013, she said, and although she obtained a clearance from a doctor to return to work as of Jan. 1, 2014, borough officials would not let her return.

The department fired her because she “suffered from several serious medical conditions and disabilities,” Ficken said in her lawsuit.

Ficken’s attorney, Paula Dillon, did not return a phone call on Monday.

Borough manager Scott Heck, who is also named as a defendant, said Ficken’s account was not accurate. He declined to comment further, saying he has not yet seen the lawsuit and that the issue is a personnel matter.

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