

Chicago Tribune



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community leaders, immigration reform activists and others joined about 500 who attended a visitation Tuesday night.



Gomes

"She was a woman of faith, a woman of prayer," Hartnett said during Mass. "She should not have died the way she died. My prayer is that her death contribute to better justice in our world."

About 120 people, including 20 local pastors, signed a "statement of concern" that will be presented to Lake County Sheriff Mark Curran and asks a set of questions about Gomes' treatment before and during her incarceration.

Gomes, 52, a former Delta Air Lines trainer who lived in a Vernon Hills hotel the past few years, died Jan. 3 at Waukegan's Vista Medical Center East after a 15-day hunger strike in jail, where she had shown signs of mental illness.

Curran has defended the care she received in jail, saying administrators relied

terminal review of the timeline and records related to Gomes' incarceration and custody.

During the funeral, Gomes' brother-in-law thanked the community for its support and said Gomes' death "has raised the issue of social justice in the world."

"The family and public at large wish to learn the truth about why she died," said Rodney Fernandes, whose wife, Lyemia, is Gomes' sister. The couple traveled from their home in England for the funeral.

"Was it because of her ethnic or immigration status or her mental status?" he asked.

As a noncitizen, Gomes wasn't eligible to serve on a jury, but ignoring a jury summons last summer led to a charge of resisting arrest when a deputy showed up at her door. That charge later led to her being jailed

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Officer given \$30K in discrimination suit

By ANNIE SWEENEY AND JEREMY GORNER
Tribune reporters

Detlef Sommerfeld left Germany in 1982 to find a better life and wound up in Chicago 12 years later with his boyhood dream job: working as a police officer.

But his covered career became a source of pain and humiliation after the Jewish officer alleged he was targeted by a sergeant with repeated religious and ethnic slurs. For years, he endured epithets including "Jew boy," "stupid German" and "Nazi," according to his federal lawsuit.

A jury found the city at fault on two counts of discrimination Tuesday evening and awarded Sommerfeld \$30,000 in damages.

The sergeant, Lawrence Knasiak, who has since left the department, faces another pending federal law-

suit by Sommerfeld, who is still on the force.

Several police officers testified they heard the disparaging remarks directed at Sommerfeld, sometimes in the presence of other supervisors.

University of Chicago



Knasiak

law professor Craig Futterman said it's not unusual for Chicago police officers to make discrimination claims against the city, but because of a longstanding "code of silence," it's rare for them to rat publicly.

"When they're singling out a fellow officer and bringing out a case against a fellow officer, saying this guy is calling me names and creating a hostile work environment, that's not that common," Futterman said. "A lot of officers

would think twice about doing it (because of fear) of retaliation."

Knasiak, who lives in Arkansas, could not be reached Wednesday, but during the trial, he denied making the remarks.

Knasiak testified he was shocked when he first learned of the accusations and came to believe Sommerfeld was angry because Knasiak had reprimanded him on the job for disobeying orders.

"I felt railroaded," he told the jury.

Sommerfeld's co-workers and wife testified the harassment affected Sommerfeld. He would step into the bathroom at work to get away from Knasiak. At home, he stopped doing things he enjoyed, his wife, Lorena, told the jury.

"We all have problems," Sommerfeld's attorney, Joseph Longo, said Monday during closing arguments. "Our problems should not be worsened by a boss at work."

Sommerfeld complained to the department's Internal Affairs Division in 2004. Three years later, the department sustained the allegations and recommended a 10-day suspension for Knasiak, but he retired instead.

In court, Longo criticized the department for taking three years to investigate the claims.

But city attorney James Botana defended the investigation, saying internal affairs was handling about 5,000 other cases and that investigators sometimes were pulled into other duties for "emergencies."

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