

Lambert sex case back in court

Convicted killer's 1996 civil suit against Pa. prison officials advances.

CINDY STAUFFER Staff Jul 6, 2007



Lisa Michelle Lambert

Lisa Michelle Lambert has returned to the court system, a place where she spent years appealing her conviction in the 1991 murder of 16-year-old Laurie Show.

But this time Lambert will be in civil court, pursuing - again - a lawsuit against Pennsylvania prison officials, who, she says, allowed two guards to sexually attack, fondle and photograph her naked at a prison in Cambridge Springs 13 years ago.

A judge recently ruled the case, originally filed in 1996, can now go forward. It had been put on hold while Lambert pursued her criminal appeals, which went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The nation's highest court declined to hear Lambert's case in 2005.

Much has happened in the 11 years since Lambert first filed her civil suit.

Two of the six people she's suing in her civil case have since died.

Lambert has moved around to prisons in Delaware and then New Jersey. About a year and a half ago, she was moved to a Massachusetts prison for "security reasons."

Lambert is now 34. The daughter she had while in prison turned 15 this past spring.

If Lambert wins any money from the civil case, it first will go to pay off court costs and restitution, her attorney said. If any money is left, it likely would go to her parents, who are raising her daughter, he said.

Lambert's suit alleges a prison guard, James Eicher, attacked her six times in 1994. Another official, John Raun, fondled her, her suit alleges.

Eicher was later fired and then convicted of aggravated indecent assault and indecent assault in the case. He served two years in prison, and was paroled in December 1999.

Lambert's civil suit also alleges that prison officials ignored her complaints and later videotaped and photographed her without clothing on.

Lambert's attorney, Angus Love of the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, also said that two similar civil suits brought against Cambridge Springs officials by other female inmates were settled immediately.

He does not know what will happen in this case.

"I don't know if Lisa will want to settle, whether the state will want to settle," said Love, whose office is in Philadelphia.

The state attorney general's office plans to vigorously defend the case, a spokesman said today.

Kevin Harley said that Lambert's allegations about Raun and about being photographed and videotaped naked are both false.

With regard to Eicher, Harley said Lambert willingly engaged in sexual contact with him. However, the law prohibits prison officials from engaging in sexual relations with inmates, even if consensual, which resulted in Eicher's conviction, Harley said.

"Eicher was fired, charged, convicted and sent to state prison," he said. "He's out. ... He broke the the law but it does not mean the entire system was broken down."

However, U.S. District Judge Sean McLaughlin had a different view of Lambert's allegations.

"Plaintiff paints a disturbing picture," McLaughlin wrote, saying Lambert alleged Cambridge Springs was a "virtual haven of sexual activity between Department of Corrections employees and inmates."

The judge also found that a former prison superintendent and official "fostered an attitude of acquiescence toward such pervasive misconduct."

In a handwritten response to Lambert's lawsuit, Eicher denied the allegations and said he was convicted due to a poorly conducted investigation, false police statements and false testimony by Lambert.

Love said he will not ask for a specific settlement amount, but leave that up to a jury, if the case proceeds to court.

Lambert now is serving her life sentence at a state prison in Framingham, Mass. She was moved there in January 2006 from a New Jersey prison.

Matt Schuman, a New Jersey corrections department spokesman, said only that Lambert was moved for "security reasons," which officials do not elaborate on.

This is the fifth prison for Lambert, who also was held in Lancaster County Prison, Cambridge Springs and prisons in Delaware and then New Jersey.

Love said Lambert had "a little problem" with some inmates in New Jersey.

He said she was held in isolation during her time in New Jersey and now is happy to be out in the general prison population.

She is taking college courses, taught by Boston University professors, and earning good grades, he said.

She regularly sees her daughter and parents, who have moved out of Pennsylvania. Love declined to say where they are living.

Lambert was convicted and sentenced to life in prison in 1992 for stabbing Show to death in Show's East Lampeter Township home.

Lambert allegedly killed Show in a jealous rage over the younger girl's relationship with Lambert's then-boyfriend, Lawrence Yunkin.

Yunkin, now 36, pleaded guilty to third-degree murder in the case and was released to a halfway house in 2005.

Lambert's accomplice, Tabitha Buck, now 33, was convicted of second-degree murder and is serving a life sentence.

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