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**Madigan son-in-law in RTA probe**

By Tim Novak and Dave McKinney

Staff reporters

The Regional Transportation Authority's top two executives - one of them the son-in-law of Illinois House Speaker Michael J. Madigan - are under investigation over allegations involving sexual and racial harassment of RTA employees.

The RTA has referred the matter to the state's executive inspector general, Ricardo Meza, following an internal investigation of the allegations, which were leveled more than a year ago against the agency's executive director, Joseph Costello, and his chief of staff, Jordan Matyas.

Matyas is the son-in-law of Madigan (D-Chicago) and the brother-in-law of Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan.

The allegations involve "a series of anonymous complaints about sexual and racial harassment complaints against Joe Costello and Jordan Matyas" involving comments made at meetings, according to a source familiar with the investigation.

RTA officials won't talk about the allegations. They denied requests from the Chicago Sun-Times for records of the investigation the RTA had done last year by Renee Benjamin, a former attorney for the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority.

The Sun-Times appealed to the attorney general's office to win the release of information on the investigation. The RTA told the agency headed by Matyas' sister-in-law it couldn't release the information because the case had been referred to Meza.

"All of the requested records . . . were submitted to the executive inspector general," the RTA's LaToya Redd wrote. "The Office of the Executive Inspector General has not made any findings. Therefore, the requested records may not be disclosed."

Under Illinois law, Meza has up to a year after "the most recent act of the alleged violation or of a series of alleged violations" to launch an investigation - unless there's a suspicion of "fraudulent concealment," which would nullify that time restriction.

The law says the subject of an investigation can request a letter from Meza's office stating that the investigation has been closed and a complaint found to be without merit. Neither Matyas nor Costello has obtained such a letter, according to an RTA spokesman.

Meza, who is barred by law from discussing an investigation, won't even say his office is investigating.

Matyas dismisses the investigation, saying it's based on "false accusations" that are "baseless, without merit and absolutely false. No evidence whatsoever has been found to support these outlandish claims, and I will not allow them to detract from my work at the RTA.

"These accusations are part of a smear campaign orchestrated by those who would rather that the RTA not be empowered by law to provide the real, effective oversight that is so desperately needed to ensure that northeastern Illinois has an efficient and world-class mass transit system."

Costello didn't respond to requests for comment.

The RTA's board has been briefed on the allegations, which prompted the agency to order "sensitivity training" for all employees and for board members.

"There's some sensitivity training - we all got some lessons in that," says RTA board member Donald Totten, a former Republican state legislator from Elgin.

Costello and Matyas were interviewed by Benjamin and RTA Board Chairman John Gates, according to Totten.

Benjamin and Gates couldn't be reached for comment.

RTA records show Matyas did two rounds of sensitivity training last year, starting with an online program covering employment law and discrimination and the prevention of unlawful harassment and workplace violence - coursework the records show he completed in 108 minutes.

Matyas also attended a two-day seminar last October in Downers Grove sponsored by Dale Carnegie Training on "How to Communicate with Diplomacy and Tact."

That session, which cost the RTA $1,695 in registration fees, was billed as a way to help participants "gain dexterity and grace in dealing with new or trying situations; recognize how you come across to others; speak honestly and confidently; become conscious of body language; master your emotions; give and receive criticism constructively; present yourself as powerful - not intimidating; and say what you need to say without offending or creating conflict," according to the RTA records.

Matyas previously was a lobbyist. He was hired by the RTA in March 2011 as deputy executive director for government and community affairs. His pay: $130,000 a year.

In June 2012, Matyas was promoted to a newly created post of chief of staff and given a $30,000-a-year raise. That opening wasn't posted internally, and no other applicants were interviewed, according to the RTA. The agency didn't fill Matyas' old job.

The RTA hired Matyas after the Sun-Times reported in 2010 that, while working as a lobbyist for a Florida company, he helped his sister-in-law's staff write legislation to cap interest rates on payday loans and create a state database to help ensure that people don't borrow more than they can repay.

Matyas' client, Veritec Solutions, stood to make millions of dollars as a result of that legislation. The state had used the company to track payday loans for five years prior to the legislative deal.

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