

Suffolk County employee endured racists taunts and retaliation, complaint says

[newsday.com/long-island/suffolk/suffolk-county-department-of-public-works-racist-taunts-y0ob4zzo](https://www.newsday.com/long-island/suffolk/suffolk-county-department-of-public-works-racist-taunts-y0ob4zzo)

Newsday Staff



From left, attorney Andrew Lieb with his client, Julio Germain, 38, of Patchogue, who has filed a claim with the State Division of Human Rights alleging he endured racial taunts and discrimination on the job while working for the Suffolk County Department of Public Works.

Credit: Rick Kopstein

By Newsday Staff Updated July 25, 2023 9:01 pm

A Suffolk County employee alleges he endured racist taunts and jokes on the job but was denied promotions in favor of less-qualified white candidates, according to court documents and a complaint filed with the state Division of Human Rights.

The Human Rights Division ruled earlier this month that "probable cause exists" to believe Julio Germain's complaints, setting the table for a mediation hearing with the county.

Germain, 38, of Patchogue, who is Black and of Cuban descent, said his white co-workers at the county highway department would ridicule him as they clocked out with "derogatory" epithets directed toward Blacks and Hispanics, according to the complaint. Germain said he informed his supervisor about the taunts and jokes.

In March of 2022, Germain said a co-worker used his cellphone in an office break room to repeatedly play parts of a 2007 South Park episode that used a racist word directed toward Blacks, the complaint alleges. One of Germain's supervisors then repeated the word, according to the complaint, which was filed in December. Workers and supervisors also teased Germain about his learning disability, the complaint alleges.

"No one should be going to work for a government municipality and dealing with this," Germain said Tuesday. "I'm being treated like a third-class citizen."

Sign up for the Suffolk news this week newsletter

The biggest news, politics and crime stories in Suffolk County, in your inbox every Friday at noon.

By clicking Sign up, you agree to our [privacy policy](#).

Suffolk County spokeswoman Marykate Guilfoyle declined to comment, citing the open investigation and pending litigation.

Froebel Chungata, regional director of the Human Rights Division, said in a statement earlier this month that an "investigation revealed sufficient material issues of fact pertaining to complainant's hostile work environment claim."

"Specifically," Chungata continued, "complainant alleges that he was subject to a hostile work environment due to his national origin and race, wherein he was routinely denied promotional opportunities and subject to ridicule by both co-workers and supervisors."

In November, Germain's attorneys filed a notice of claim — a necessary precursor to a lawsuit against the county that would seek monetary damages and compensation for lost promotions.

"We'd also like to see them have to do training and to change their policies because we see it as systemic," said Germain's attorney, Andrew Lieb of Smithtown. "It's not just one supervisor, but a second supervisor [that engaged in the conduct]. And when Julio made complaints to higher-ups, they retaliated."

In response to the Human Rights complaint, attorneys for the county said Germain was turned down for promotions because he was involved in three accidents while driving county vehicles and received a ticket for passing a stopped school bus.

"According to his supervisors and co-workers," the county's response stated, "Germain enjoyed the banter in the workplace and often initiated it by telling jokes and imitating those he worked with."

Germain said the racist and inappropriate jokes began shortly after he started with the Department of Public Works in 2019 as an auto equipment operator. In addition to remarks about his race and ethnicity, co-workers made derogatory comments about his intellect because he has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Germain said Tuesday.

By Newsday Staff

Streaming Now

Feeling the squeeze ... Gilgo latest ... St. Rocco's meatballs ... DelGuidice talks Billy Joel

[Get more on these and other NewsdayTV stories](#)