

Written by

Reza Gostar

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Ex-officer who sued Desert Hot Springs dies of shot to head

DESERT HOT SPRINGS — Andrea Heath, a former Desert Hot Springs police officer involved in a \$5 million lawsuit against the city, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, officials said Thursday.

Cathedral City police Sgt. Ed Colon said the incident was first reported at 9:06 p.m. Tuesday. The shooting is still under investigation.

Desert Hot Springs Police Chief Kate Singer released the following statement two days after Heath's death:

"We extend our heartfelt sympathy to former Officer Heath's family and friends. We are respecting their privacy in this matter and have asked a department liaison to work with them to provide assistance for the service and a potential fund for Ms. Heath's daughter."

In Heath's suit filed with the U.S. District Court against the city, Heath claims she witnessed an officer abuse a person being placed under arrest and filed a complaint with the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

Heath told a federal grand jury that because of the complaint against police Sgt. Anthony Sclafani, who was convicted in 2012 for excessive use of force against two suspects in 2005, she was retaliated against. Heath said she was harassed by fellow officers, demoted from investigator and not given backup when requested.

"We were going to win the appeal," Jerry L. Steering, Heath's attorney, said Thursday.

"I had a settlement conference with the Ninth Circuit Court today."

Steering said he cannot believe that his client would have taken her own life when she was so close to winning her case. He said the Riverside County coroner office told him Wednesday the cause of death was still pending.

The 81-page suit names the city of Desert Hot Springs, Sclafani, former City Manager Rick Daniels, former police chief Patrick Williams and current Chief Kate Singer, who was chief commander, as defendants. Singer was named chief in August of last year.