

CONFERENCE CALL SCHEDULED IN UNION SUIT VERSUS FIRE DISTRICT

BY DAVE HAWKINS

THE STANDARD

397 WORDS

2,558 CHARACTERS

A May 16 conference call is scheduled in the wrongful termination suit brought against the Hualapai Valley Fire District (HVFD) by a union-hired lawyer. Plaintiff attorney Eric Hallstrom said parties in the suit and U.S. District Court Judge James Teilborg will map out a schedule for filing briefs and conducting hearings.

Hallstrom represents former longtime HVFD firefighters Jeff Campbell and Oscar Lopez and four others who allege they were wrongfully dismissed by Fire Chief Wayne Eder. He said any trial(s) in the matter

wouldn't likely be held until next spring though he would be pleased if the matter could be favorably resolved before then.

“We'd much rather resolve the lawsuit amicably than to go to trial which is expensive and hard work and it takes a long time,” Hallstrom said. “If they choose to reinstate all six people tomorrow, then that's what we're trying to get out of this lawsuit.”

The Prescott-based lawfirm of Murphy, Lutey, Schmitt and Fuchs is defending the HVFD in the legal Action.

While the litigation unfolds in federal court in Phoenix, Hallstrom said he hopes for speedier action on the local level. Both Campbell and Lopez took their firings to an independent appeals board in extended hearings held February 15th.

The independent appeals board issued a recommendation to overturn Chief Eder's decision to dismiss Campbell. It did not do so in the instance of Lopez, however, it recommended that the HVFD revamp its personnel policies, specifically in the area of termination and the appeals process.

Both firefighters should get their jobs back on the strength of the appeals board's personnel policy assessment, according to Hallstrom.

“They have an opinion from an independent board on record saying ‘your personnel policies are in need of revision’”, Hallstrom said. “Why would the board want to risk a potentially unfair dismissal?”

HVFD board members are not bound by the recommendations of the independent appeals panel. During a recent meeting they said they were unprepared to consider the recommendations, indicating a preference for acquiring and reviewing transcripts of the appeals hearing before considering action.

Local Firefighter's Union President Robert Borker has urged the board to prepare themselves and schedule the appeals board recommendations for their deliberation as soon as possible, saying that the career firefighters deserve timely resolution of their matters.