

## LAPD Officer Raped Woman and then Dept. Tried to Bury Case, Threatened her with Jail

By Matt Reynolds / Courthouse News

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### 2009 RAPIST COPS JAMES NICHOLS AND LUIS VALENZUELA

Los Angeles strung along and tried to bury the case of a woman who was sexually assaulted by a police officer while his partner stood watch, the woman claims in court.

Tara McMahon demands \$1 million in damages from Officer Luis Valenzuela, who she claims attacked her in late 2009 in his car while his partner, defendant Officer James Nichols, kept watch.

Her complaint for assault, sexual battery, aiding and abetting, civil rights violations and other counts also names the City of Los Angeles as a defendant.

McMahon claims that when she reported the assaults the LAPD did nothing and tried to keep her quiet, allowing Valenzuela and Nichols to remain on duty: and to sexually assault three more women.

McMahon says she had encountered the officers several times before the attack. Describing herself as "young, vulnerable and alone," McMahon claims the officers had made "inappropriate" comments to her after she was arrested in September 2009, and on another occasion bought her food and alcohol, and called her phone.

"Their contact became threatening: on one occasion, Valenzuela pulled his gun and put it to her head," the 15-page lawsuit says.

McMahon says she was walking her dog in Hollywood in late 2009 when Valenzuela and Nichols pulled up in a Volkswagen Jetta assigned to them for plainclothes work, and ordered her inside. Valenzuela then drove them to a secluded spot.

"Nichols reached back and took McMahon's dog, while Valenzuela got out and entered the back seat with McMahon," the lawsuit states. "Nichols kept a lookout in the front seat while Valenzuela, using force and threats, sexually assaulted McMahon in the back seat. Valenzuela then threatened her and said she would be in danger if she told anyone."

McMahon says she was too afraid to go to the police. The officers threatened her with jail and Valenzuela pleaded with her not to report the alleged crimes because he has a family, the lawsuit states.

She claims the officers dangled other incentives, offering to get her a medical marijuana card and buy her a ticket to Las Vegas if she left town and did not come back.

"Another time, Valenzuela asked her to go to a motel room with him and smoke methamphetamine," the complaint states. "He told her that he would get the room and bring the meth, and that he wanted to 'watch her' smoke it. McMahon refused."

In January 2011, McMahon was arrested and taken to the Hollywood station, where she told a detective about the alleged assault. The matter was handed over to Internal Affairs, she says.

"McMahon finally worked up the courage to report them - but then she was stonewalled and strung along for nearly three years by an LAPD Internal Affairs detective who mixed false promises that the officers would be brought to justice with a repeated command: Don't talk to a lawyer," the complaint states.

It continues: "Internal Affairs did nothing. The officers remained on the job and sexually assaulted at least three more women the way they assaulted McMahon."

She says she later learned from a story in the Los Angeles Times that investigators had raided Nichols' and Valenzuela's homes. Though the Times reported that the two had been suspended, McMahon says the men were neither fired nor indicted for assaults on her and the other women.

McMahon claims she knew the LAPD had strung her along when she learned of two pending lawsuits against the officers - one for sexual assault and another filed by a man who was allegedly beaten by the officers.

"McMahon then realized that the city had been trying to keep her quiet and avoid being sued," the complaint states.

She seeks punitive damages. She is represented by Daniel Miller with Miller Barondess.

The city did not immediately respond to a request for comment.