

FUR FLIES BETWEEN HUMANE SOCIETY, LAWRENCEVILLE WOMAN

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LAWRENCEVILLE — It's turning into a real dog fight. The legal battle between the Atlanta Humane Society and a Lawrenceville woman over comments she made on the Internet heated up Wednesday when the two parties met in a Gwinnett courtroom, exchanging biting remarks for the first time in person.

Gwinnett Superior Court Judge Billy Ray denied Wednesday the Humane Society's motion to keep records closed to Kathi Mills. Mills insists those documents are part of discovery and will prove that the statements she made, including calling the agency's director Bill Garrett "Mr. Kill," are true.

"I'm very pleased the court recognized the Atlanta Humane Society doesn't have any trade secrets to keep hidden from the public," she said after the 45-minute hearing. "And I do need these documents to prove the truth."

Mills is being sued for \$75,000 by the Humane Society for libel. Mills and her attorneys say the statements are protected by the First Amendment.

And while the two parties say they are fighting ultimately about the care of stray dogs and cats, things took a strange turn when Mills' allegations of a sexual affair between Garrett and a Humane Society employee arose during the court hearing.

Mills and her attorneys are asking for hotel receipts and the like that may prove Garrett is having the affair, said her attorney, Brian Oxman of Los Angeles.

"Basically, this is part of my assessment of his ability to lead the Atlanta Humane Society," Mills explained.

The sexual affair allegation was made in conjunction with Mills' comments on the Internet concerning him being "not worthy to lick the dog or cat poop off our shoes," she said.

Ray, however, warned Mills and her attorneys about going down such a path.

There is a lot of emotion in this case. It reminds me of a divorce hearing," he said. "And with this whole affair issue, if I were the defendant I would be very careful. It didn't seem to make any sense."

Attorney James Zito, for the Atlanta Humane Society, told Judge Ray the whole reason for Wednesday's motion for a protective order was because of the "scurrilous allegations" of an affair.

"I'm outraged," Zito told Ray after Oxman addressed the issue of the sexual affair. "This is not a public issue. This is an issue to destroy people's lives. Make no mistake about it," he added, visibly angry.

Ray also commented that it would appear some of the statements Mills made are probably not libelous, especially the comments about the "dog and cat poop."

"No reasonable person would determine this as fact," he said.

And Oxman said the judge's comments bode well on a possible jury trial in the lawsuit.

"I think the court is already skeptical of the allegedly defamatory statements. We believe when you look real close, none of the statements are," he said.

Now, the Humane Society must turn over all documents requested by Mills, such as donor lists. Greenblatt said they will find no proof of the affair.

"I'm angry about it," he said after the hearing.

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