

Fired library worker files whistleblower suit

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[By Emma Perez-Trevino, The Brownsville Herald](#)

A public library is known for its quiet.

However, a rumble is stirring at the Brownsville Public Library after allegations of credit card abuse and theft of food.

The accusations are contained in a whistleblower lawsuit former employee Irma Coleman filed against the city of Brownsville Wednesday in the 404th District Court.

Coleman claims she was fired May 30 from the library's food booth after reporting that supervisors charged steaks, pillows and juices to city credit cards at taxpayers' expense.

"That is patently false," library Director of Public Information Services Jerry Hedgecock said Thursday. "Ms. Coleman was fired for theft of city property."

Hedgecock said the alleged theft involved food items from the cafe at the Southmost branch.

Coleman's lawsuit alleges she was accused of eating seven candy bars and a package of CornNuts within a month and not paying for them, an accusation she denies.

"She did nothing wrong," her attorney John Shergold said. "We will zealously defend her rights."

The lawsuit cites the whistleblower provision in the Texas Government Code, which provides that a governmental entity cannot suspend, fire or retaliate against an employee who in good faith reports a violation to law enforcement.

According to the petition, Coleman received a letter from Library Services Director Jerry Salazar on May 12, alleging that she violated city policy. She was given notice of a pre-disciplinary hearing on May 27.

In the interim, Coleman's petition states, she contacted Brownsville police on May 23 and reported the alleged misuse of credit cards and that she had seen some staff failing to pay for food from the food booth.

Shergold said Coleman felt compelled to report this information to police after being falsely accused.

Coleman's petition states that no evidence was presented against her at the May 27 hearing.

She was fired May 30 and City Manager Charles Cabler upheld her termination June 25, according to the lawsuit.

Coleman's allegations were investigated, Cabler said Thursday.

"For now, we don't see anything to substantiate her allegations," Cabler said. "If she has more information, we are open to any and all information."

Coleman's lawsuit seeks injunctive relief, reinstatement to her former position, legal expenses and unspecified monetary damages from the city.