

Attorney David K. Jaffe, who regularly represents individuals whose civil rights have been violated by municipal police officers and police departments recently brought a case on behalf of Michael Stewart against the Hartford Police Department, Officers Rhashim Campbell and Kent Lee and other members of the Hartford Police Department. The commencement of the case, alleging unreasonable use of force and the other related claims, was reported in the accompanying Hartford Courant article, dated August 16, 2011.

## **Former Prisoner Sues Hartford Officers Over Jail-Cell Assault Claims Police Department's Conduct Extreme, Outrageous**

By HILLARY FEDERICO and CHRISTINE DEMPSEY, [hfederico@courant.com](mailto:hfederico@courant.com)

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New York resident Michael Stewart, who alleges that he was beaten unconscious by two Hartford officers at police headquarters in 2009, filed a civil lawsuit Tuesday that claims the officers, the police chief and two supervisors violated department policies in connection with the assault.

Former officers Rhashim Campbell and Kent Lee, Police Chief Daryl K. Roberts, and supervisors Lt. Kevin Ahlquist and Det. Gustavo Rodriguez are each named in the lawsuit for conduct defined as "extreme and outrageous and exceeds all bounds usually tolerated by decent society."

The incident, on Nov. 1, 2009, was captured on surveillance video. The suit alleges that Campbell and Lee beat Stewart in a scuffle while Ahlquist and Rodriguez, charged with overseeing the booking area the morning of the alleged assault, did nothing to stop the alleged assault.

In May 2010, a Hartford Police Department internal affairs investigation determined that Lee and Campbell deprived Stewart of his basic rights and used excessive force in the execution of their duties when they beat him in a holding cell. Ahlquist was also found to have failed to properly supervise subordinates and failed to comply with department procedures.

Campbell was arrested and found not guilty of charges. A prosecutor declined to sign a warrant for Lee's arrest.

The incident happened after Stewart, who had been arrested earlier that evening on charges of interfering with an officer and breach of peace, reached between the bars of his jail cell and touched Campbell in the back of the head.

Campbell allegedly approached Stewart, and the two became involved in a physical altercation initiated by Campbell, according to the lawsuit. Campbell and Lee allegedly started shoving Stewart and "beat his head against the wall of the holding cell."

The lawsuit alleges that the "brutal beatings" continued after Stewart was moved to another cell and included "violent and repeated" kicks, knees and punches to his face and body for an "extended period of time." During part of these alleged beatings, the lawsuit alleges, Stewart was unconscious.

"We don't believe justice has been done," said attorney David K. Jaffe of Brown Paindiris & Scott. "we want to pursue justice for Michael Stewart, who has been unreasonably harmed and seriously injured by officers Lee and Campbell."

Stewart, who is suffering from a traumatic brain injury that prevents him from sleeping through the night and also prevents cognitive deficiencies, also sustained injuries including a severely sprained neck, post-traumatic stress disorder, swelling to his face and head and a severe left wrist contusion, according to the lawsuit.

Campbell was found not guilty of both third-degree assault and tampering with physical evidence, a charge stemming from an allegation that he falsified his report of the jail-cell clash, in early May. Campbell had been on the force for five years before being terminated without pay in Dec. 2009.

Lee, who served more than 20 years at the department, retired shortly after allegations of his involvement in the beatings surfaced.