

Ex-employees sue disability attorney

By Anne Gonzales, Sacramento Bee

A prominent Carmichael quadriplegic attorney who sues small businesses for disability access violations has been sued by employees alleging wrongful termination, sexual harassment and a hostile work environment.

The four female workers say they were hired as legal assistants but were first “forced to go through personal care training,” including taking off their boss’s underwear and putting on his swim trunks, according to the suit filed in Sacramento Superior Court in August.

Calls to attorney Scott Johnson’s office for comment were not answered.

Johnson has been in Lake Tahoe for several years suing small businesses who are out of ADA compliance.

The employees, who worked for the law office operated out of Johnson’s Carmichael home, also were uncomfortable with some of Johnson’s business practices in gathering evidence for lawsuits and his payments to students to sign declarations, according to the suit.

The workers were trained to care for their boss in case a personal attendant was not present. During the training, they helped Johnson out of bed, undressed him, put on his swimsuit, carried him to a hot tub, then removed him from the tub, took off his wet trunks, dried him off and rubbed lotion on him before dressing him, the suit says.

The plaintiffs also claimed that Johnson aimed cameras on them in the office, including one trained on an employee’s breasts,

and placed a camera in the restroom, keeping tabs on them through a 72-inch screen TV in his upstairs bedroom and a mobile application on his cellphone.

The plaintiffs – Jenna Doeuk, Esra Jones, Monthica Kem and Micaela Lucas – say they lost their jobs Aug. 9, after protesting the working conditions. They seek economic, general and punitive damages, along with court costs and attorney's fees.

The plaintiffs worked for Johnson at his firm, Disabled Access, for anywhere from one to five years.

The suit alleges the workers were forced to go into businesses to see if they were in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Johnson has built a legal career around threatening to sue hundreds of businesses for noncompliance with the ADA, typically settling for undisclosed amounts after fixes or upgrades were made.

In a recent local case, Ford's Real Hamburgers in Sacramento closed last weekend, citing a slowdown in business and a Johnson suit over alleged ADA violations.

The plaintiffs said they felt like they were "committing fraud" by visiting businesses "under the ruse" of seeking the businesses' goods or services. They also used restrooms to check for violations, sometimes while Johnson waited outside in his van.

They claimed Johnson would sometimes merely drive by businesses that were potential lawsuit targets. He also would find disabled students in housing complexes he was interested in suing, the lawsuit alleges, and paid up to \$150 month toward their rent. In one instance, he asked a student to sign a declaration of some kind.

The employees also complained that Johnson made sexual comments, stared at their breasts and buttocks, asked them

about their bathroom habits, displayed racy calendars, required them to help him change his dress shirts and made them do his son's homework.