

Netanyahu's ex-chief of staff named as aide held for sex offenses

Gil Sheffer questioned under caution and ordered to house arrest for 5 days following a month-long investigation

BY RAOUL WOOLLIFF | December 1, 2016, 3:52 pm |

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's former chief of staff was named on Thursday as the senior aide who was reported to have been placed under house arrest on suspicion of sexual offenses.

Gil Sheffer, who held the top post in the prime minister's bureau from May 2012 to July 2013, was questioned under caution Tuesday and ordered to house arrest for five days following a month-long investigation.

The woman who accused Sheffer of assault filed charges six weeks ago claiming the 47-year-old former official locked her in an apartment against her will and forcibly tried to kiss her after meeting at a conference.

She said Sheffer gave her a ride home and during the journey, sat next to her on the back seat, plied her with alcohol, and touched her against her will. He then allegedly took her to an apartment where there were other men, forced her to perform for them, and tried to kiss her against her will.

Sheffer's lawyer, Gil Fridman, said on Tuesday that the claims were "baseless," and would be proven wrong. "At the end of the investigation it will become clear that there was nothing untoward in my client's actions," Fridman told Channel 2 news.

It was not immediately clear whether the incident took place before or after Sheffer left the Prime Minister's Office.

Sheffer's resignation as chief of staff after just one year on the job came amid reports of a previous sexual harassment allegation against him dating back some 15 years.

In 2012, a woman filed charges against Sheffer for sexual harassment but then-attorney general Yehuda Weinstein ruled not to open a police investigation due to the statute of limitations having passed. In 2013 the claims were first made known to the public when the woman made another request of Weinstein to investigate the claims, purporting to have new evidence of the crime, but after consultation with the Civil Service Commission it was again decided not to open a probe.

The departure was reportedly agreed upon with the prime minister, and Sheffer denied his resignation had anything to do with the allegations against him. "There was no connection between the departure and these claims," Sheffer said in a statement at the time.

The Prime Minister's Office also said the resignation was unrelated to the allegations.

The scandal was a further blow the Prime Minister's Office given Sheffer had replaced Nathan Eshel as chief of staff, who was himself forced to quit amid a harassment investigation.

In 2012, Eshel stepped down as part of a plea bargain over allegations of sexual misconduct; specifically that he had used a surreptitiously placed camera to film under the skirt of a female colleague. He was also accused of accessing her private emails.

The sexual harassment claims against Sheffer appear to have been filed in light of a separate investigation into alleged financial irregularities at the prime minister's official residence. Sheffer was also revealed Thursday to have been questioned in connection with the case.

Sheffer was reportedly questioned under caution by the Lahav 443 anti-corruption unit of the Israel Police two weeks ago.

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