

Whistle-blower sues city

Plumber alleges he was terminated for speaking out

By Michael Higgins
Tribune staff reporter

A plumber in the city's Water Management Department filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday against city officials, alleging that he was fired for speaking out against abuses in the Hired Truck Program.

In the suit, Patrick McDonough charged that even after a hearing officer ordered him to be reinstated to his job in January, he has faced ongoing retaliation.

"They gave him a demotion. They cut his pay," said Jon Loevy, attorney for McDonough. "They messed with his shift. . . . They won't stop."

McDonough, 45, was fired in April 2005 for allegedly violating the requirement that employees live in Chicago.

In the lawsuit filed Tuesday, McDonough said the dispute actually started in 2001 when he complained to the city's inspector general that trucks—owned by firms with political

connections—were being paid to sit idle at city job sites.

McDonough said he also complained that overtime was distributed based on cash bribes to supervisors or intervention by aldermen.

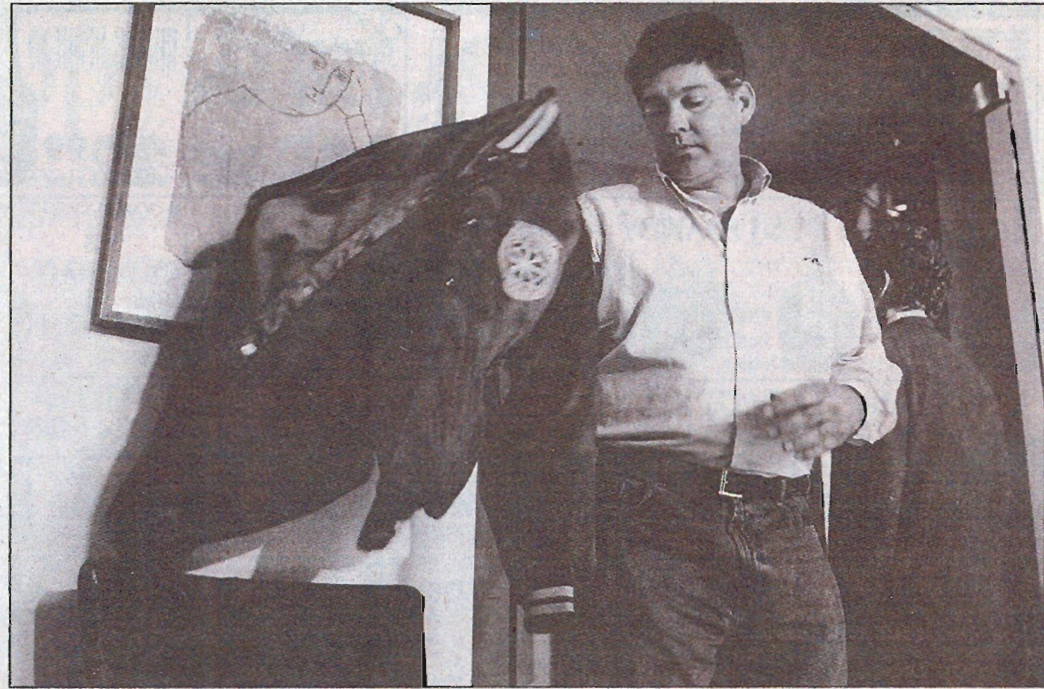
After becoming frustrated with the city's lack of response, McDonough spoke to the Sun-Times in 2003 and also to federal investigators, according to the lawsuit.

McDonough alleged that city officials responded not by investigating wrongdoers, but by looking at whether he met the city's residency requirement.

Jennifer Hoyle, spokeswoman for the city's Law Department, said Tuesday that the city's former inspector general, Alexander Vroustouris, investigated McDonough based on an anonymous tip—not in retaliation.

Named as defendants in the suit are the city and various current and former officials, including Donald Tomczak, a former senior water department official who has pleaded guilty in the Hired Truck scandal.

Carl McCormick, a hearing officer for the city's Human Resources Board, examined



Tribune photo by Scott Strazzante

Patrick McDonough, a plumber in the city's Water Management Department, sued the city Tuesday, alleging he was fired for speaking out against abuses in the Hired Truck Program.

McDonough's case in January and found evidence of bullying and bribery at the Water Management Department's North Side facility.

McCormick ruled that McDonough should be rein-

stated, finding that the city had not proven he lived outside of Chicago.

But McCormick rejected McDonough's claim that he was fired because he was a whistle-blower. He also con-

cluded that McDonough should have been suspended for six months for failing to cooperate with investigators.

Both McDonough and city officials have appealed the ruling.