

# THE AM LAW DAILY

June 15, 2011 4:33 PM

## **Detroit Sues Ex-Venable, Saul Ewing Police Monitor for \$10 Million**

Posted by Brian Baxter

Sheryl Robinson Wood, a former [Venable](#) and [Saul Ewing](#) partner who served as a federally mandated police monitor in Detroit from 2003 until 2009, has been sued for \$10 million in fees she accrued while allegedly carrying on an improper relationship with former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

[The Associated Press reported Tuesday](#) that the city's suit against Wood--filed last month in state court--has been moved to federal court in Detroit at her lawyers' request. As part of the suit, the city claims for the first time that Wood and her former employers submitted fraudulent invoices to a federal court, [according to The Detroit News](#).

Kilpatrick--[whose own legal troubles have been well documented](#)--has been appearing this week in Wayne County state court, where local prosecutors are [seeking to seize profits from the disgraced mayor's soon-to-be-released tell-all autobiography](#).

Lawyers representing the city of Detroit initially filed a [21-page civil complaint and more than 100 pages of attached exhibits](#) against Wood last month in Wayne County. In the suit, the city accuses the former Venable and Saul Ewing partner of improperly charging Detroit for millions in legal fees while ensuring that the city was meeting its obligations under a consent decree reached with the Justice Department's civil rights division in 2003.

[The Am Law Daily reported last November](#) that the city was seeking the disgorgement of \$10 million in fees from three of Wood's former employers at Venable, Saul Ewing, and risk assessment firm [Kroll](#) on the grounds that she was unable to be an unbiased police monitor because of her relationship with Kilpatrick.

The Detroit News reports that in a deposition given by Kilpatrick [in another civil case](#), the former mayor testified that he had "an intimate session one night in a hotel" with Wood but that the two didn't have an affair, which Kilpatrick defined as "some kind of long-lasting relationship."

Wood worked for Kroll from July 2003 to October 2007, helping the company reap \$6.2 million in fees for its services in connection with the Detroit consent decree. She then moved to Saul Ewing, where she stayed until [joining Venable in January 2009](#). Saul Ewing received nearly \$2.5 million for Wood's police- monitoring work, while Venable was paid almost \$1.4 million, according to court records.

Wood left Venable in 2009 after the FBI, as part of its investigation of Kilpatrick, [uncovered text messages between her and the former mayor](#). A federal judge overseeing the consent decree has ruled that she does not have to repay any of the money she billed on behalf of her employers during that time, but that Detroit can sue for breach of contract and other civil claims seeking the return of those fees.

[As previously reported by The Am Law Daily](#), the Justice Department has filed documents stating that Wood, not her former employers, should be on the hook for the potential return of \$10 million in legal fees paid out by Detroit.

[Dykema Gossett](#) partner James Feeney and Thomas Murray and Stephen King of Birmingham, Mich.-based [King & Murray](#) are representing the city of Detroit in the matter. (Murray and King are former Dykema partners, [having left the firm in January to start their own litigation boutique](#).)

William Sankbeil, cochair of the litigation group at Detroit's [Kerr, Russell and Weber](#), is representing Venable and Saul Ewing in the suit. Sankbeil did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

David Schertler, a name partner of Washington, D.C.'s [Schertler & Onorato](#), is representing Wood in the suit. He declined to comment when reached by The Am Law Daily on Wednesday.

Wood's previous lawyer, former Schertler & Onorato partner Vincent Cohen, Jr., [left the firm last year](#) to become principal assistant U.S. attorney for the U.S. attorney's office in Washington, D.C.

Source: <http://amlawdaily.typepad.com/amlawdaily/>