

Pr. George's Man Wins Damages in Brutality Suit

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A federal civil jury has found that Prince George's County police and correctional officers violated the rights of an Adelphi man who was arrested and strip-searched after he protested how a county police officer was treating a friend who was involved in a minor traffic accident. The jury awarded the man \$260,000.

After three days of testimony and two days of deliberations in U.S. District Court in Greenbelt, the jury decided late Monday that county police officer Keith Washington battered David Paul Maslousky, 42. The jury awarded Maslousky \$200,000 in compensatory damages and ordered the county to pay \$10,000 in punitive damages for Washington's actions.

In his closing argument, Assistant County Attorney Andrew Murray acknowledged that Washington was "pompous, arrogant and rude." But, he told the jury, "No one has a constitutional right to a cordial police officer."

The jury also found that county correctional officer Antonio Bentley violated Maslousky's constitutional rights against unreasonable search by strip-searching him. Washington had arrested Maslousky on a nonviolent misdemeanor charge, which was later dropped. The jury awarded Maslousky \$50,000 for the illegal strip-search. The county indemnifies police and correctional officers for civil awards stemming from their actions as officers and pays such judgments.

"I feel I have some of my dignity back," Maslousky said.

"I don't know a man who deserves justice more than Maslousky. Again, this shows the county police department can't take care of its own problem officers," said Terrell N. Roberts III, Maslousky's attorney. He said an internal police investigation had cleared Washington of any misconduct.

Deputy County Attorney John Bielec, whose office defended Washington and Bentley, said the verdict "is inconsistent with the facts" and will be appealed.

Federal and state civil juries have awarded plaintiffs at least \$5.1 million so far this year for brutality and other types of misconduct by county police and correctional officers.

According to court testimony, the incident occurred Nov. 1, 1997, when Paul B. Essex, a lawyer who lives in Hyattsville, ran a red light and hit another car at Metzerott and Adelphi roads. Washington, who was training another county police officer, arrived, gave Essex traffic citations, and began to search Essex, who was returning from National Guard training.

Maslousky, a friend of Essex's, came to tow Essex's car, according to testimony. When Maslousky implored Washington to take it easy on Essex, then 58, Maslousky was arrested and charged with hindering a police officer. When he drove Maslousky to the Hyattsville station, Washington taunted Maslousky, telling him "Bubba" would be waiting for him in jail and would have his way with him, Maslousky testified.

Essex also sued Washington; the jury awarded him \$1 in damages for battery.

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