

LITIGATION

Job applicant wins Charles County lawsuit

BY CARYN TAMBER

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A black woman has won her race- and sex-discrimination lawsuit against the **Charles County Sheriff's Office**.

Pernevllyn Coggins sued the office after a less-qualified white man was hired for the systems administrator job for which she had applied and interviewed.

Last week, a federal jury awarded Coggins \$75,000 for emotional damages and \$19,158.50 for lost wages.

"We're disappointed in the verdict and we have maintained all along that there was no discrimination in this case," said Gary Charles May, an attorney for the sheriff's office. "The reasons we declined to hire the plaintiff were for valid nondiscriminatory reasons: her behavior during the backgrounds process, the absence of some documents she was to have submitted to background investigators and some concerns about her behavior with a prior employer."

Coggins' lawyer, Jonathan C. Puth of **Webster, Frederickson & Brackshaw** in Washing-

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ton, D.C., said the jury clearly disagreed with the county's position, taking less than an hour-and-a-half to deliberate Friday. Puth said a juror told him the panel decided on liability "right out of the box" and spent most of the time figuring out the award.

Coggins had been ranked as the interview panel's top candidate for the job but

faced discrimination from the office's human resources division, Puth said.

"What we proved at trial was that Pernevllyn Coggins ... was turned down for the job because she asked human resources what the salary would be for the position, whether it was negotiable and whether she could get copies of some of her documents; and they reacted very poorly to this African-American woman asking questions that are very common for applicants to ask," he said.