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# Court rules in favor of ex-officer

**LAWSUIT** An appeals court rules that a former Fort Worth police officer involved in a whistle-blower lawsuit is entitled to back pay and damages from the city.

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FORT WORTH — A former Fort Worth police officer won another legal victory Thursday when an appeals court ruled that she was retaliated against after seeking criminal charges against her ex-husband, a fellow police officer.

Cyndi DeOreo Thompson is entitled to back pay and compensatory damages from Fort Worth, the 2nd Court of Appeals ruled. Art Brender, Thompson's attorney, estimated the total could reach \$140,000.

"I'm grateful for the court's decision and I hope this gives rank-and-file officers more protection when they report violations of the law," Thompson said. Thompson said she was forced to leave a "job she loved."

Thompson filed her whistle-blower lawsuit in 2001, saying she

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## LAWSUIT

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was treated unfairly, subjected to a hostile workplace and denied a transfer out of the traffic division after she was treated harshly by her colleagues.

The situation became so uncomfortable that she resigned in July 2000, said Thompson, who now works as an investigator for a state agency.

City Attorney David Yett would say only that he would talk to the city manager and the City Council to see whether they wanted to appeal to the Texas Supreme Court. The city appealed Thompson's ruling after she won in state District Court last year.

The original cash award, including attorneys' fees was about \$100,000, court records show. Brender said the additional \$40,000 comes from added attorneys' fees and loss of salary.

Thompson said her work situation at the Fort Worth Police Department became intolerable after she pursued aggravated kidnapping charges against her ex-husband, former police officer Tim Harkrider.

In 1996, Harkrider held Thompson captive and assaulted her inside her apartment after arguing with her for not spending enough time with him, according to police reports.

Harkrider eventually pleaded guilty to false imprisonment with serious bodily injury and was fired.

But Thompson's troubles continued. She was told more than once by other officers that her reputation had been damaged because of what was commonly called the "Harkrider report," the courts ruling said.

On at least two occasions her supervisor, Capt. M.R. Baldwin, told Thompson that "you've got the stigma attached to you because of Tim Harkrider," the court's ruling said.

"It wasn't just one incident that led me to do this. It was a series of events," Thompson said.

For example, after a tornado hit downtown Fort Worth in March 2000, Thompson said, she was called in to work on her day off. Thomp-

son said she was not relieved from duty until the rest of her unit had been allowed to go home.

Thompson said she later heard that Baldwin had told the dispatcher to make sure she was the last one to be dismissed from overtime duty that night. When asked about it, Baldwin mentioned the Harkrider incident, the court's ruling said.

On more than one occasion, Thompson said, she was verbally abused by other officers and that those incidents were not investigated in a timely fashion, the court's ruling said. When she wanted to transfer out, her request was denied.

The daughter of a Chicago police officer, Thompson didn't want to quit her job. But the situation became so insufferable that she felt she had no other option but to resign, she said.

Thompson said she suffered migraine headaches, eventually was hospitalized for treatment of high blood pressure and felt that she betrayed her father's memory by quitting the force.

Thompson said she would like to continue her career as a police officer, but was "still pondering" whether to return to the city police force.

During the trial on her lawsuit, it was suggested that Thompson was being singled out for retaliation because her husband was a personal friend of Police Chief Ralph Mendoza before he was named chief in 1999.

Brender said it is possible that other police officers, knowing about Mendoza's and Harkrider's relationship, wanted to please the chief by harassing Thompson.

Mendoza could not be reached to comment.

But Lt. Jesse Hernandez, a police spokesman, pointed out that Mendoza recommended Harkrider be fired. Hernandez also emphasized that Thompson resigned from the department and was not terminated.

"That comment should be laid to rest," he said.

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