

PRESS RELEASE

FEDERAL JURY FINDS THAT ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE VIOLATED FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS OF ONE OF THEIR OWN LAWYERS

A federal jury in Los Angeles has found the County of Orange and Deborah Kwast, the current Orange County Public Defender, liable for violating the First Amendment rights of plaintiff Olu Orange, a former Public Defender who was terminated from the office in January 2003.

A jury of four men and four women handed down the unanimous verdict at 6:00 p.m. on August 11, 2005. The jury found that Mr. Orange's "termination from the Orange County Public Defender's Office was in retaliation for the exercise of his constitutional right to freedom of speech on matters of public concern under the First Amendment." The jury awarded Mr. Orange \$88,884 in compensatory damages.

Mr. Orange was represented by attorneys Michael Seplow and K. Arianne Jordan of Schonbrun DeSimone Seplow Harris & Hoffman LLP in Venice., California.

“ We are proud to represent Olu Orange, a courageous lawyer who battled for his clients while employed at the Orange County Public Defenders Office and stood up for his personal right to express his views on issues of public concern. We are pleased that the jury agreed that Mr. Orange was wrongfully terminated for exercising his First Amendment rights. We believe that this verdict sends a strong message that public employees enjoy the right to freedom of expression on matters of public concern and that they cannot be retaliated against for exercising their rights without consequence.” said Mr. Orange's attorney, Michael Seplow.

Defendant Deborah Kwast is the current Public Defender of Orange County. At the time of Mr. Orange's termination, she held the Number 2 position in the office.

The trial was held before Judge Christina A. Snyder in U.S. Federal District Court Case No. CV-03-6147.

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