

NEW JERSEY

Jury awards firefighters \$1 million in bias suit

By John Shiffman
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A federal jury yesterday awarded \$1 million in damages to two black deputy fire chiefs in Camden after finding that they had experienced decades of racial discrimination and retaliation.

Kevin Hailey and Terrance Crowder sued in 2001, alleging that city Fire Department officials violated their First Amendment rights by retaliating against them

for public comments critical of senior city officials and department policies. The plaintiffs also said they were subjected to a hostile work environment and racial discrimination. They said that, solely based on their race, they were wrongly disciplined and denied promotions.

The eight-person jury, sitting before U.S. Magistrate Judge Joel Rosen, rendered the verdict after three days of deliberations.

"We found that there were egregious racial practices in the Fire Department," said jury foreman Robson Ehioba, who lives in Mount Laurel.

Hailey, 44, and Crowder, 42, were battalion chiefs when they sued. In 2003, they were moved up to deputy chiefs, among the highest-ranking posts.

The jury awarded Hailey \$170,000 in compensatory damages and \$300,000 in punitive

damages. Crowder was awarded \$216,000 in compensatory damages and \$350,000 in punitive damages.

Lewis Wilson, the Camden city attorney, said, "We respectfully disagree with the jury's verdict and fully expect to appeal the decision."

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