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Crime

Jury sides with ex-TYC Judge Koustoubardis, saying he was fired for reporting misconduct



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A former administrative law judge for the Texas Youth Commission was awarded \$700,000 by a Dallas jury last week after jurors agreed that he was fired for complaining about misconduct by fellow judges.

"It has been a long road," said Christopher Koustoubardis. He said he wasn't surprised that the jury found in his favor, but he was disturbed that "the people that instigated this whole thing against me are still there, and the abuse that I reported is still going on at TYC."

In March 2008, Koustoubardis told the TYC ombudsman and others that his supervising judge had met with a police officer prior to a parole hearing and tried to influence the officer's testimony as a witness. He also said the judge instructed him to rule a certain way in the hearing, which he did not do.

A few months later, Koustoubardis helped the ombudsman's office investigate a complaint about another judge tampering with a government record.

"[In] these two cases that I reported, the kids were not getting a fair trial at the parole revocation hearings," Koustoubardis said.

At the time Koustoubardis stepped forward, the Texas Youth Commission was embroiled in a scandal that resulted in an agency overhaul. In 2007, the agency was rocked by reports of extensive sexual abuse and cover-ups at several facilities. An ombudsman was eventually named to investigate allegations of misconduct, including complaints such as those from Koustoubardis.

A couple of weeks after the second incident, the supervising judge recommended that Koustoubardis' employment be terminated. Koustoubardis filed his termination grievance Sept. 22, 2008, and the termination took effect Oct. 1.

The jury deliberated for a little less than five hours, said Koustoubardis' attorney, Don Tittle.

"The jury's verdict really reflected, I guess, the seriousness of the firing," Tittle said. "He was a guy in his mid-50s and had taken the job in large part because the state had such a good retirement plan, and the jury's verdict reflected that he was retaliated against and it was going to have a significant effect on the amount he would receive in pension."

Koustoubardis had worked for the agency since 2002.

Koustoubardis, who is now in private practice and is running for a county court-at-law judgeship, said he doesn't know if he'll receive the entire judgment recommended by the jury because of a statutory cap of \$250,000.

"The verdict's not going to be overturned," he said. "The amount of money is the problem."

Jim Hurley, spokesman for the Texas Youth Commission, declined to comment. Tom Kelley, spokesman for the Texas attorney general's office, said that after a final judgment is rendered the TYC will have 30 days to decide whether to appeal.