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Nassau to appeal suit's \$950G award

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Nassau officials said yesterday the county will appeal a \$950,000 award in a federal lawsuit by a correction officer who convinced a jury that she was denied the opportunity to become a police officer in the county because of gender discrimination and harassment.

"We are appealing because we believe the decision is incorrect as a matter of law and fact," said County Attorney Lorna Goodman.

U.S. District Court Judge Frederic Block in Brooklyn ruled Monday that Patricia Luca, 38, of East Meadow, would get \$754,589 of the award, while the remainder, \$195,384.86, would go to counsel and costs.

Luca started her legal saga in November 2000, when she charged she was sexually harassed at the Nassau County Jail in East Meadow where she had worked for more than four years. In mid-2003 the case was settled out of court. Six months later, Luca, who was on the civil service list for police officer and under the usual pre-appointment investigation, was notified she had become "non-select."

She filed a new lawsuit in February 2004, saying the listing and other action by investigators were harassment. A jury awarded \$150,000 in compensatory damages to Luca last year. Block gave the rest Monday for potential lost pay.

Goodman said Luca was not retaliated against. "She simply was unable to satisfactorily explain her expensive homes and cars on a correction officer's salary," she said, and thus didn't pass investigation.

But Luca's Hempstead lawyer, Fred Brewington, said "it is clearly discrimination and retaliation that both judge and jury verified. They killed her dream of becoming a police officer, and even the judge knew she would not be accepted as one even if it were possible."