

Panel again OKs settlement

- **Ex-human rights officer** to get \$900K from Nassau
- **Politics, gender, race** cited by fired employee

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Nassau legislative committees for a second time have approved a nearly \$900,000 settlement with a former county human rights commission official who said she was fired for her politics, gender and race.

The Rules and Finance committees yesterday voted unanimously for the deal with Renaire Frierson, a Republican dismissed in 2008 under former County Executive Thomas Suozzi, a Democrat.

The committees approved the same deal last year by a party-line vote, but the full leg-

islature — which Republicans control by an 11-8 majority — never called the resolution to fund it. Republicans said then that they didn't have the 13 votes needed to borrow for the \$895,000 settlement payment.

After hearing from the county attorney's office yesterday in executive session, Democrats indicated a willingness to support the deal when it comes before the full legislature on March 24. If bonding is OK'd at that meeting, the deal must be approved by the Nassau Interim Finance Authority, the county's financial control board.

"The legal reasoning from the county attorney's office was sufficient for us to believe the settlement is in the taxpayer's best interest," said Legis. Dave Denenberg (D-Merrick), a finance committee member.

Frierson, of Freeport, was appointed executive director of Nassau's human rights commission in 2001, under Republican

County Executive Thomas Gullotta, but frequently clashed with Suozzi, a Democrat, after he took office in 2002. Suozzi dismissed Frierson that year, but reversed course when he learned that only the commission had the power to do so.

In 2007, Suozzi nominated new commission members that the legislature approved, and the new board voted 8-4 to fire Frierson in 2008. She filed suit against the commission and the Suozzi administration for civil rights violations, claiming she was targeted because she was a black, female Republican.

The administration maintained it had nothing to do with the second firing, saying it was a commission decision.

An audit by former County Comptroller Howard Weitzman, a Democrat, found Frierson had been lax in running the commission, allowing employees to be paid for days they didn't work. Weitzman also



Renaire Frierson was fired for a second time in Nassau in 2008.

said Frierson submitted time sheets for commission work while actually teaching at Nassau Community College.

Frierson has denied wrongdoing. Her attorney, Frederick Brewington, of Hempstead, said yesterday that he's confident the matter is close to being settled. "We're hopeful this process will work," he said of the approvals still needed.