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Jury Awards Mother \$4.9M In Parental Rights Case

Lawyers: Daughters' Removal Based On Fabricated Evidence

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SANTA ANA, Calif. -- A jury said a Seal Beach mother whose young daughters were placed in foster care should get \$4.9 million from Orange County for violating her parental rights.

Deanna Fogarty-Hardwick's daughters, 6 and 9 at the time, were taken away from her in 2000 based on fabricated and suppressed evidence from two social workers, the mother's lawyers said.

In a 10-2 decision Friday evening, jurors decided Fogarty-Hardwick's right to raise her children free of governmental interference had been violated, her attorney Shawn A. McMillan said.

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"I had no idea that this would consume my life, and my children's lives, and my ex-husband's life for six and a half years," Fogarty-Hardwick said Monday. "It was a struggle I would not wish on anyone."

The \$4.9 million verdict included approximately \$4.5 million in general damages against Orange County for providing inadequate training and/or supervision to the social workers and for showing deliberate indifference.

"In essence, the county saw what was going on and didn't do anything about it," McMillan said Monday.

Jurors return to Superior Court Judge Ronald Bauer's courtroom this week to consider punitive damages.

Attorney Glen Stebens, representing Orange County, declined to comment Monday. Dr. Michael Riley, the director of Children and Family Services for the Department of Social Services, said he learned of the verdict Monday.

"We were quite surprised," Stebens said.

Fogarty-Hardwick said her children were taken away seven years ago and she was only allowed monitored visits with them for two years when they were placed first at Orangewood Children's Home and then with foster parents.

Her ex-husband was given custody of the children in 2002, and she was given visitation two weekends a month, Fogarty-Hardwick said. The woman now shares custody of her daughters with her ex-husband.

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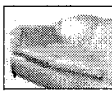
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