

# County News

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## UNION TWP.

### Judge Rejects State Bid To Stall Paying Damages

By Christine Sokoloski

The state and Hunterdon Developmental Center may not wait until after an appeal to pay three workers seeking to collect a \$1.6 million judgment, a judge has ruled.

The state is appealing a December jury verdict that awarded three black employees damages for racial harassment they suffered at the center and for retaliation from management when they reported the incidents.

A jury had found former employees Donald Greenfield and Annie Sampson and current employee Charles Bennett were subject to racial harassment and retaliation by supervisors when incidents were reported.

Mr. Greenfield and Ms. Sampson were awarded \$285,000 and \$575,000, respectively, for past and future lost wages as well as lost benefits and medical costs. Mr. Bennett, who still works at the center, was awarded \$50,000 for the pain and humiliation he suffered.

Until its appeal is heard, the state has sought to avoid payment.

Deputy Attorney General Don Cantinello has argued that the state might not get the money back if it pays the damages and the verdict is later overturned.

"This is \$1.7 million of taxpayers' money going out of the state that may not come back," he told Superior Court Judge Edmund Bernhard. The \$1.6 million judgment has been accruing interest since the trial.

"The fact that this is taxpayer's money makes no difference," countered Leonard Artigliere, Mr. Greenfield's attorney. "Taxpayer money is no better than anyone else's."

Judge Bernhard said the state did not prove it would suffer irreparable harm if it paid the damages, and that the state can get the money back the same way the plaintiffs were trying to get it now, through the courts.

Judge Bernhard is also expected to rule by tomorrow on a motion requesting the state pay approximately \$500,000 in fees for the four lawyers representing the plaintiffs.