

# Three Hunterdon facility workers accept \$1.65 million in bias case

By JEAN BRANDES

Three plaintiffs who won a jury verdict on their claims of racial harassment at the state's Hunterdon Developmental Center have accepted a \$1.65 million settlement.

The three black employees of the facility in Union Township were awarded a total of about \$2.3 million in compensatory and punitive damages, medical expenses and attorneys' fees.

A jury found in December that Annie Sampson of Phillipsburg, Charles Bennett of Easton, Pa., and Donald

---

*'The state does not admit any liability with the settlement, and we can now put this case behind us.'*

— **John McKeegan,**  
state spokesman

---

Greenfield of Maryland were subject to a racially hostile work environment.

The jury also found the employees were retaliated against for reporting racial incidents to supervisors at the state facility for developmentally disabled persons.

In the settlement, which was completed Monday, the state agreed to drop its appeal of the verdict, according to James Pfeiffer, who represented Bennett.

"The state does not admit any liability with the settlement, and we can now put this case behind us and go back to the work of the Hunterdon Developmental Center, which

is to care for the people who live there," said John McKeegan, a spokesman for the state Department of Human Services.

The agreement calls for the state to pay the employees within 30 days. The settlement includes legal fees.

The attorneys for Sampson, Greenfield and Bennett said their clients agreed to settle to avoid a lengthy appeals process.

"The main reason was the fact that this thing was going to drag out a substantial period of time through the appeals process and possibly the Supreme Court," said John McDonnell, who represents Sampson.

"It would have been very stressful waiting that period of time. She's not working. She really needs the money," said McDonnell.

The appeal could have taken a year or two, and it would have been financially and emotionally draining for Greenfield to wait it out, according to his attorney, Len Artigliere.

"There was no question my client would have prevailed on appeal. He was not up to continuing this thing in the appellate court and Supreme Court," Artigliere said.

"He just wanted to put it behind him and get it over with," added Artigliere.

"At least they feel they were vindicated and their claims were heard," said Pfeiffer.

There was testimony during the trial that the employees witnessed racial incidents involving co-workers and were retaliated against for reporting the incidents to superiors.

Sampson and Greenfield testified they became ill as a result of the racially hostile atmosphere and had to resign. Bennett still works at the center.

Officials of the center claimed they dealt appropriately with racial incidents. They denied that little was done about a culture of racism in the building where Bennett, Sampson and Greenfield worked.