

Community worker won't get \$2,000

Judge throws out jury's slander award

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A \$1.5 million slander suit that netted the plaintiff \$2,000 has now dissolved into a penniless reversal by a Baltimore Circuit Court judge.

In overturning the jury award, Chief Judge J. Harold Grady ruled yesterday that former community relations worker Lance V. Ambrose failed to show conclusively that the defendant acted maliciously in saying that Ambrose had come "close to obstruction of justice."

The defendant, Howard Gersh, an assistant city state's attorney, made the statement about Ambrose nearly 5½ years ago.

The November 1978 suit filed by Ambrose, who asked for \$1.5 million, had been dismissed and revived by other courts before it went to trial before a jury last month.

The jury, after deliberating for nearly two days, decided that Gersh did slander Ambrose. But the panel didn't award any damages.

When Grady then told the jury it had essentially returned a verdict in favor of Gersh, the panel left the courtroom to deliberate for 10 minutes more and returned with a judgment awarding \$2,000 in damages to Ambrose.

Gersh's attorney, Glenn Bell, filed a mo-

tion asking Grady to throw out the jury's verdict, and that is just what the judge did yesterday.

Grady ruled that Ambrose didn't prove that Gersh made his statement maliciously, which, in this case, would have meant that Gersh knowingly lied or recklessly disregarded the truth.

Grady also said that no payment of damages was warranted in the case because Ambrose didn't prove that any harm resulted from Gersh's statement.

Gersh made the statement about Ambrose in connection with Ambrose's behavior during an investigation of a fatal shooting of a young man by a Baltimore policeman.

The victim's mother filed a civil rights complaint in the case and Ambrose, as a representative of the Community Relations Commission, accompanied her to the police station, where he advised her to get an attorney before answering any questions.

Gersh, who was present that day at the police station, later characterized Ambrose's behavior in the incident as being close to an indictable offense for obstruction of justice because Ambrose was interfering with an official police investigation.

Gersh made his statement at an October 1978 hearing on police brutality held by the city's Community Relations Commission.

Ambrose's attorney, Sheldon Laskin, said he will appeal Grady's ruling.