

\$500,000 awarded in harassment claim

A former Hawaiian Airlines flight attendant has won more than \$500,000 from a Circuit Court jury based on a sexual harassment claim involving a pilot and the company.

The former flight attendant, who was 25 at the time, re-

ported to her supervisors that the pilot, Gary J. Kissinger, grabbed her buttock while she was deplaning passengers on an interisland flight on Oct. 11, 2002.

The flight attendant, who wants to maintain privacy,

said she immediately complained to her supervisors at the time of the harassment. But nothing was done to protect her, according to her attorneys, Bruce Kim and Ronald Albu.

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Flight attendant wins \$510,000 in harassment suit

By Rosemarie Bernardo

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A Circuit Court jury has awarded a former Hawaiian Airlines flight attendant more than \$500,000 in a sexual harassment claim involving a pilot.

In a trial before Circuit Judge Karen Ahn, the jury returned a verdict in a lawsuit Tuesday of \$510,000 against Hawaiian Airlines and its pilot, Gary J. Kissinger.

The flight attendant, who wants to maintain anonymity, said the company failed to take her complaint seriously when she reported that Kissinger sexually harassed her, and that he was not adequately reprimanded for his actions.

In a written statement, Keoni Wagner, spokesman for Hawaiian Airlines, said, "Hawaiian Airlines does not tolerate harassment of any kind involving its employees, and we took immediate and appropriate action in this case. As such, we were surprised by the verdict and do not believe the facts support a finding against the company, and we are considering an appeal."

On Oct. 11, 2002, the flight attendant, who was 25 at the time, was deplaning passengers on an interisland flight when Kissinger grabbed her buttock, according to the suit. The flight attendant screamed and jumped back into deplaning passengers, said her attorney, Ronald Albu.

She immediately reported the harassment to her supervisors, but no action was taken. Throughout the rest of the workday, Kissinger continued to harass her.

"He tried to rub her back," Albu said. "He tried to engage her several times. He made her uncomfortable through the rest of the day."

She later sought the assistance of the Association of Flight Attendants, Hawaiian Airlines Council 43.

Albu said she also reported to union representatives that the pilot had a history of

harassing other flight attendants, a violation of Hawaiian Airlines' sexual harassment policy.

During the trial, several other flight attendants testified of inappropriate conduct that included touching and comments made by Kissinger, according to the flight attendant's attorneys.

The flight attendant also complained that the company "failed to conduct a complete investigation or to impose adequate discipline to stop the harassment," said a news release from Albu and Bruce Kim, another attorney representing the flight attendant.

Union representatives reported the sexual harassment to the company's human resources department.

The flight attendant had requested to stop flying with Kissinger, but her request was ignored.

Following the harassment, the flight attendant took about nine months of voluntary unpaid leave. She quit her job about a year after the initial complaint.

"She was having anxiety attacks. She was fearful that she would have to fly with him again," Albu and Kim said.

The former flight attendant, now 30, was employed with the company for two years before she resigned.

The jury awarded \$120,000 in compensatory damages to the flight attendant, \$250,000 in punitive damages against Hawaiian Airlines and \$140,000 in punitive damages against Kissinger. Hawaiian Airlines and Kissinger will also cover attorney fees for the former flight attendant.

The jury's decision sends a strong message that companies need to take sexual harassment seriously, Kim and Albu said.

Kissinger, a Mililani resident who is described to be in his 50s, has been with Hawaiian Airlines for 20 years. He is still employed with the company.

Kissinger declined to comment.