

Former mint worker wins hostile environment lawsuit

On September 23, 2005, a federal jury awarded former Denver Mint employee April Garcia Kaas \$80,000 after deciding that she was subjected to an environment that was hostile to women. Jurors ruled against her claim that she was treated differently because she was a woman and a Hispanic. Colorado U.S. District Judge Wiley Daniel will rule later on questions of back pay.

The Case

Kaas started to work at the mint in 1993 and left in March 2000 after her boss allegedly struck her during an argument. Lawyers for the mint accused her of exaggerating.

Kaas got a restraining order against her boss from a Denver county judge, but mint officials refused to keep the two separated. They argued that the mint is a federal enclave where county court orders do not apply.

Former and current mint workers testified that male managers ruled by fear and intimidation, made unwelcome sexual advances towards women and displayed offensive pictures and graffiti.

“I’m very pleased that they found on the hostile environment claim,” said Marisa Williams, Kaas’ lawyer. “There is a hostile environment there and maybe they’ll have to change.”

Acting U.S. Mint Director David Lebryk issued a written statement saying the mint is committed to being

“a model workplace free from discrimination, harassment and favoritism.”

What This Case Means to Counties

This ruling is important to counties because it emphasizes that hostile environment claims can be costly. All counties should have adopted policies, procedures, and regular training for all personnel to be in compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws. The case emphasizes that government officials regardless of authority, location or size, will be expected to respect the civil laws of Colorado.

For more information, contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.