

Ex-Nassau worker awarded \$1.8M in wrongful-firing suit

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A federal jury has awarded \$1.8 million to a former Nassau employee, finding the county had fired her improperly six years ago.

However, the jury dismissed claims by Georgi Morgenstern, who worked in the planning department, that she was fired in retaliation for being a whistle-blower who alleged misuse of public money, according to Deputy County Attorney Esther Miller.

The jury in Central Islip on Friday found that Morgenstern was a permanent employee entitled to the full termination process, and not a probationary worker who could be fired at will as the county contended, Miller said.

Former Chief Deputy County Executive Anthony Cancellieri fired Morgenstern in December 2003, after she mocked County Executive Thomas Suozzi over a live microphone in an empty legislative meeting room. Her comments were broadcast throughout the executive building.

Morgenstern contended she was fired because she complained that Suozzi misused public money.

Miller said the jury awarded Morgenstern \$1.5 million in compensatory damages and \$300,000 in punitive damages against Cancellieri, former county personnel director John Donnelly and Planning Commissioner Patricia Bourne.

Morgenstern's lawyer, Douglas H. Wigdor of [Manhattan](#), said he was pleased the jury found his client suffered emotional damage and that he looked forward to future hearings to award economic damages and lawyer fees. "At the end of the day, you're looking at an award we believe to be well over \$5 million," he said.

Miller said the county will appeal.

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