

Woman wins \$2.1 million in federal suit

A judge awards Monta Troutman of Raleigh damages in a 1990 accident in which an FBI van hit her. Officials have 60 days to decide whether to appeal.

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RALEIGH — A Raleigh woman won a \$2.1 million judgment this week as compensation for a 1990 accident in which she was hit by an FBI van and suffered brain damage.

The award, which could be appealed by the U.S. Attorney's Office, is one of the largest judgments in North Carolina against the federal government.

"I think a lot of people will be surprised that a federal judge gave an award that large for pain and suffering," said Don Strickland, attorney for Monta S. Troutman. "But her life has been drastically altered.

Troutman was walking across Dawson Street in downtown Raleigh on Oct. 24, 1990, when she was hit by a U.S. government van being driven by an on-duty FBI investigator.

She received critical injuries, including a broken arm, pelvis and spine. She also suffered brain damage that has altered her personality. Her short-term memory is gone. She cannot taste or smell, and she has sudden rages.

"At times, she is the sweet person she used to be, and then she goes from being pleasant and nice to being unpleasant," Strickland said. "This has had a tough effect on her family and friends."

Bills for Troutman's treatment have mounted. After leaving the hospital, she spent months at a rehabilitation center in Durham,

where she had to be taught everyday skills to become independent again.

The center, Learning Services, agreed to delay billing Troutman for \$100,000 in treatment she received until her lawsuit was settled. Her medical bills total \$210,000, and she is expected to need an additional \$600,000 in treatment through the remainder of her life.

Those kinds of bills, said Strickland, make the award much smaller than it appears.

"That's all the money she will ever get," he said.

Strickland said Troutman would use part of the money to pay someone to help manage her daily schedule. Because she has no short-term memory, Troutman forgets doctor appointments and treatment schedules.

Troutman initially sought \$3 million from the federal government, which never contested that it was liable for the accident. Instead, the government sought to limit the amount that Troutman should recover to \$1.5 million, Strickland said.

The case went to trial in November before U.S. District Judge Terrence W. Boyle.

This week, he ruled that Troutman was entitled to \$210,000 for her medical expenses; \$270,000 for past and future lost wages; \$600,000 for her future medical needs; \$36,000 as compensation for her scarring; and \$1 million for pain, suffering and disability.

Officials with the U.S. Justice Department in Washington will review the case to determine whether to appeal the judge's award. They have 60 days in which to file a notice of appeal.

"I hope it is not appealed — she desperately needs the money now," Strickland said.