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Tow company owner awarded \$259K in discrimination lawsuit against Prince George's town

By: [Heather Cobun](#) Daily Record Legal Affairs Writer May 22, 2018

A Prince George's County jury has awarded more than \$250,000 to a Palestinian-American man who took over a towing company that provided services Riverdale Park but was prevented from continuing that business relationship by town officials and police.

The verdict in favor of Mamoun K. Ashkar, announced Friday, reflected four years of lost business. Ashkar is still not providing tow services to Riverdale Park, according to one of his lawyers.

"Local government cannot discriminate against its citizens and this case is about fairness, justice and equality and this verdict speaks to that," Levi S. Zaslow said Tuesday. "We are very open to sitting down with the town and speaking about these practices and ensuring a fair and equitable process going forward."

The defendants included Riverdale Park, town officials and police but only the discrimination claim against the town went to the jury after a four-day trial. The jury deliberated for two hours before returning with a verdict.

Ashkar became the owner of Greg's Towing Inc. in January 2015. Greg's handled all towing for the town under a local purchasing preference policy because it had the only lot within the town's limits, but another company had taken over towing in Riverdale Park while the owner of Greg's prepared to sell, according to the complaint.

Once Ashkar took over the business, he was unable to learn from town officials why Greg's would no longer be the primary tow service for the town. While waiting for a meeting with police, he overheard members of the department discussing how to "get rid of him" and using racial slurs, the lawsuit states.

Greg's subsequently lost its business license despite paying fees and providing requested documentation and did not receive a temporary license until more than a year later, the lawsuit states. The business was also subjected to repeated inspections based on complaints made by town officials, the lawsuits states.

Zaslow, senior counsel at Joseph, Greenwald & Laake P.A. in Greenbelt, said the defendants contended their decisions were not based on Ashkar's nationality.

"Their theory was it was the town's business decision but we were able to systematically prove that it was no business decision at all but rather a pretext for discrimination," he said.

Town and police department leadership also defamed Ashkar and deprived Greg's of business throughout the county, the lawsuit states, by refusing to allow the company back on the county police "tow list" and claiming it was not legitimately licensed and its employees couldn't pass background checks, which temporarily led police not to use Greg's.

Riverdale Park Police also charged Ashkar with disturbing the peace and obstructing an officer's investigation in April 2015 when he arrived at the scene of a crash at the request of a third party and police refused to allow him to tow the vehicle, according to the complaint. The charges were later dropped by prosecutors.

"We're confident that now that the jury has spoken, the town is going to do the right thing and fix these practices," Zaslow said.



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Kevin Karpinski and Mike Rynd of Karpinski, Colaresi & Karp P.A. in Baltimore, lawyers for the defendants, did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

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Mamoun K. Ashkar, et al. v. Town of Riverdale Park, et al.

Court: Prince George's County Circuit

Case No.: CAL 16-07777

Judge: Toni E. Clarke

Proceeding: Jury trial

Outcome: Verdict for plaintiff for \$259,212 (\$244,212 for economic damages and \$15,000 in noneconomic damages)

Dates:

Incident: March 2014 to present

Suit filed: March 24, 2016

Verdict: May 18, 2018

Plaintiff's Attorneys: Levi S. Zaslow, Maritza M. Carmona and Timothy F. Maloney of Joseph, Greenwald & Laake P.A. in Greenbelt

Defendants' Attorneys: Kevin Karpinski and Mike Rynd of Karpinski, Colaresi & Karp P.A. in Baltimore

Count: Discrimination