

\$350k verdict for attack on Muslim cabbie

By: Peter Vieth December 8, 2015

A federal jury has awarded \$350,000 to a Muslim cab driver who said he was reviled for his religion and then physically attacked by a drunken Fairfax County businessman during a 2013 cab ride.

The cabbie's lawyer says the verdict reinforces his criticism of the Fairfax County prosecutor's office for dropping all charges against the businessman, Edward Dahlberg, after the incident.

The verdict in favor of Mohamed Salim under a Virginia civil hate crimes statute allows for an additional award for costs and attorneys' fees.

The jury determined that Dahlberg assaulted Salim and that Dahlberg's actions were motivated by animosity to Salim's religion, according to the jury's verdict form. The jury awarded \$100,000 in compensatory damages and a \$250,000 in punitive damages.

Salim, the cab driver, used his cellphone to record a stream of angry and profane epithets from Dahlberg, denouncing the driver as a Muslim and equating him with terrorists. The jury heard the recording in court.

The video ended before Dahlberg allegedly punched Salim. Salim claimed he suffered a fracture of his jaw in the attack.

Salim was represented by Victor M. Glasberg of Alexandria. He said Dahlberg rejected a \$300,000 settlement proposal before trial. The only offer was for \$125,000, Glasberg said.

Glasberg said he is open to discussion about resolving the case now to avoid a "substantial" award of attorneys' fees and to avoid appeal.

Dahlberg was represented by Steven W. Bancroft of Fairfax, who did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Dahlberg reportedly told The Washington Post, "I'm ruined. I'm absolutely ruined."

Glasberg said the verdict shows there was no justification for the 2013 action by Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Raymond Morrogh to drop all criminal charges against Dahlberg.

The move was "the product of professional irresponsibility and abdication of a public trust amounting particularly to a slap in the face of the Muslim community," Glasberg said.

Glasberg said the cellphone video clearly established at least that an assault had taken place, even if there were questions as to whether it ripened into battery.

Morrogh did not immediately respond to a request for comment.