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Sex abuse victim awarded \$5 million

By Marty Roney
mroney@gannett.com

PRATTVILLE -- A circuit judge has entered a \$5 million judgment, one of the largest in Autauga County's history, in a civil case where a mentally retarded man was sexually abused by a caregiver.

Judge Sibley Reynolds signed the order last week giving the family of the victim \$1 million in compensatory damages and \$4 million in punitive damages, according to courthouse records. Phillip Alexander Hamilton, 43, was the in-home caregiver of the victim, records show.

The *Montgomery Advertiser's* policy is not to identify victims of sex crimes. The incident occurred in September 2005 and Hamilton later pleaded guilty to sexual abuse charges. He is serving a five-year sentence at Limestone Correctional Facility, according to information provided on the Alabama Department of Corrections Web site.

"The amount of the judge's award in this case is certainly appropriate based on the reprehensible nature of Mr. Hamilton's conduct," said Tommy James, the victim's Birmingham attorney. "The judge is very sympathetic to what my client went through as a result of the abuse. What Mr. Hamilton did is the very definition of a breach of trust, and the family of my client is happy to see justice has finally been done."

Hamilton could not be reached for comment.

According to court records, Autauga-Elmore Mental Retardation Inc. employed Hamilton and the company paid an undisclosed settlement to the victim's family on Feb. 26.

James is pragmatic about ever collecting any of the judgment.

"We are researching to see if Mr. Hamilton owns any property," he said. "We may place liens on property or garnish his wages when he is released."

The settlement is "huge" by Autauga County standards, said Circuit Clerk Whit Moncrief, who has been courts clerk for eight years.

"It's the biggest settlement in recent memory," he said. "You just don't see big awards coming out of Autauga County. Our juries have a reputation of being sensible and our judges are conservative. There is no jackpot justice in Autauga County."
