

# Jury awards woman \$2.1 million for false arrest at Walgreens

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LOS ANGELES; A Los Angeles jury has awarded \$2.1 million to a woman who claimed she was called "hot," leered at sexually and falsely arrested by two Walgreens security guards who also asked for her phone number.

"My client feels vindicated," the plaintiff's attorney, James DeSimone, said Thursday. "It took a long time and it's been an extremely traumatic event for her."

Leslie Price, the attorney representing Walgreens, could not immediately be reached for comment.

"We're deeply disappointed and quite frankly shocked by the verdict," said Walgreens spokesman Michael Polzin.

According to the lawsuit, Alicia Benham and friend Daniel Newman tried to return nine bottles of a diet drink to a Walgreens on April 17, 2004. Instead, two security guards accused them of theft and "terrorized them" by holding the pair in separate rooms without windows, said DeSimone.

Newman made a confidential settlement before the trial began earlier this month in Los Angeles Superior Court.

The Wednesday verdict for Benham was against Walgreens, S&J Security Investigation Inc. and one of the security guards, Omar Ray, DeSimone said. The second security guard could never be located, DeSimone said.

Sam Danskin, the attorney who represented Ray, could not immediately be reached for comment. Attorney Lena Marderosian, who represented the security company, declined comment.

Benham's testimony "was that he told her how hot she looked and that she could work this out if she wanted to get her friend released," DeSimone said of one of the security guard's threats. "She worried she was going to be sexually assaulted."

The security guards demanded private information about Benham, including her phone number, according to the suit.

Benham tried to call for help when the security guards left the room, having to reassemble her cell phone that had been smashed against a wall by a guard, according to the lawsuit.

After she called police, the guards told her she would be going to jail.

The guards made a citizen's arrest and told police Benham shoplifted the drinks, DeSimone said.

One of the guards told a police officer that had Benham "just given him her phone number, he would have let her go," according to the suit.

According to the lawsuit, Ray had been arrested multiple times. The arrests included one in 1997 for assault and another in 2003 for a misdemeanor loitering with intent to commit prostitution. In 2003, he was convicted of a felony possession of cocaine base, possession of marijuana for sale and for carrying a loaded firearm in 2003, the lawsuit said.