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Olympia agrees to pay woman Tasered at city jail

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OLYMPIA - The city of Olympia has reached a \$260,000 settlement with Cynthia Brown, who was illegally strip-searched and shot with a Taser in the city jail in 2008.

“I think it’s vindication to some degree,” said Edwin Budge, Brown’s Seattle-based attorney. “It was supposed to send a message to the city...”

Despite settling the matter, the city denied liability. Donald Law, the city’s outside counsel for the case, gave a brief statement.

“Our primary goal throughout this process has been to reach a fair settlement with Cynthia Brown,” he said. “That has now been accomplished. We are pleased and ready to move on.”

Brown sued the city in September, as well as three male corrections officers — James Roberson Sr., James Roberson Jr. and Michael Renard, a cadet. Brown’s suit claimed her civil rights were violated and that the strip search was illegal.

According to public documents, Brown was arrested and taken to the city jail on Aug. 19, 2008 on a misdemeanor trespassing charge, which was later dismissed. While Brown was in jail with the two other male corrections officers, Roberson Sr. ordered her to strip to her underwear.

Brown refused, asking for a female officer to be present. Roberson Sr. told her a female officer wasn’t available and commanded her to partially disrobe.

After Brown continued to refuse, Roberson Sr. shot her with a Taser, striking her in the chest. Brown then removed her clothes.

An internal investigation conducted by the Olympia Police Department agreed with Brown that her civil rights were violated and that state law does not permit strip-searches by the opposite sex. But it adds that the corrections officers were following “expected procedures” at the time.

Then-Police Chief Gary Michel emailed a letter of apology to Brown in 2009. Michel retired last year.

As a result of the incident, the city changed jail-booking procedures, no longer allowing opposite-sex strip searches. The revised policy says corrections officers “must have reasonable suspicion to believe a strip search is necessary to discover weapons, criminal evidence, contraband or other items.”

Police Chief Ronnie Roberts, who started the job in January, has said he has started an “exhaustive” review of jail policies.

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