

## **Washington Verdict Spotlights Military Discrimination**

### **Local News**

Posted by:

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - A U.S. District Court jury this week awarded \$485,000 to a Washington National Guard member who claimed she had been harassed and discriminated against because of her military assignments.

Sgt. Grace Campbell says coworkers at her civilian job resented having to cover her responsibilities during deployments, and that she was fired when it was learned she was being deployed again. Campbell says her supervisor told her if the deployment was voluntary and she didn't pass it up, her job would be at risk.

I told her that I thought I had a duty to do it; the military was my job as well. At that time, I'd been in for about 16 years, serving with the 81st Brigade, and I told her I felt I needed to do something. - Sgt. Grace Campbell

Campbell says she was without work for two years, and now makes less money than at her previous job. Her former employer, Catholic Community Services, has the option of appealing the jury's decision.

Last month, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., introduced [SB 2299](#), a bill to strengthen job protections for service members, including allowing the government to be a party in soldiers' lawsuits against employers.

With more than 770,000 National Guard and Reserve members back from deployments in the past decade, similar complaints are on the increase. Campbell's attorney, James Beck, says he has worked on multiple cases for soldiers having difficulty re-entering the civilian workforce. He has this advice for employers:

"Whether they feel like this is a hardship on the company or not, they've got obligations to ensure that there's not resentment among coworkers in a person's absence, and that the military member returns to a work environment and job substantially similar to what they had when they left for their service obligations."

There is an official process for service members' employment-related complaints, although it has been described by veterans' groups as difficult and expensive to navigate.

The text of Murray's bill is online at [cecil.md.networkofcare.org](http://cecil.md.networkofcare.org).