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N.J. spent \$60M to settle lawsuits last year, one of the lowest payouts in years.

By Blake Nelson

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New Jersey taxpayers had to shell out nearly \$60.7 million last year to settle lawsuits, one of the lowest payouts in nearly a decade.

Many cases were by state employees who accused bosses of discrimination, at agencies ranging from NJ Transit to the State Police.

At the same time, lawyers for the state attorney general's office were able to pull in more than \$95.2 million from people and companies accused of misconduct, an increase from the previous year.

"We take seriously our responsibility to protect New Jersey and its residents, and we do that in part by keeping our costs low," acting Attorney General Andrew Bruck said in a statement sent by a spokesman. "I'm immensely proud of the career attorneys in our Division of Law who work hard every day in the service of their fellow New Jerseyans."

Payouts

The largest settlement by far was won by the New Jersey Primary Care Association, a Trenton-based nonprofit.

The group represents community health centers, which help low-income and uninsured residents. The association said many Medicaid claims hadn't been properly reimbursed over the years, and the state eventually handed over nearly \$20 million.

An association spokeswoman declined comment.

Several cases dealt with the corrections system.

Shelley Pritchett, a former officer with the Juvenile Justice Commission, received more than \$2.2 million after she said state officials failed to accommodate a medical condition. Paul Kamienski, who spent decades behind bars before his double-murder conviction was overturned, won nearly \$1.5 million.

A spokesman for the state attorney general's office declined to comment on specific suits.

The most famous case is likely Katie Brennan's, the former campaign volunteer for Gov. Phil Murphy who accused a top staffer of rape.

New Jersey and Murphy for Governor, Inc. agreed to pay \$1 million, more than half of which Brennan pledged to the Waterfront Project, a Hudson County nonprofit that helps low-income survivors of sexual assault.

The rest went to attorneys' fees. Neither side admitted wrongdoing.

Two of the biggest settlements dealt with NJ Transit, including one veteran employee who sued the agency for age and racial discrimination. Ophelia Adderley received more than \$1.2 million last year.

A spokeswoman for NJ Transit declined comment.

Only a handful of the 270 total cases appeared to involve police.

Of those, Trooper Daria Mammen received the largest amount, \$200,000, after she accused the State Police of blocking her from a promotion because a pregnancy temporarily took her away from work, according to court records.

The State Police didn't respond to a request for comment.

Recoveries

As in previous years, many cases dealt with pollution.

The largest recovery of more than \$16 million stemmed from a years-long court battle over concerns that New Jersey water was contaminated by a chemical found in gasoline called Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether, or "MTBE."

The state's environmental protection agency flagged pollution at thousands of sites and blamed dozens of companies, including BP and Shell. None admitted wrongdoing.

The money is only a fraction of what those companies will pay overall. An attorney general spokesman said the case has already pulled in about \$390 million total while a few organizations, including Exxon Mobil, have not yet settled.

Apple handed New Jersey more than \$3 million, after multiple states accused the company of secretly crippling older iPhones to push customers to buy new ones. (The company did not admit wrongdoing.) Honda forked over a similar amount after admitting its Takata Airbag had a safety defect that could "kill or seriously injure" passengers.

New Jersey received a total of 593 payments, including small fines from individuals, a far lower number than the previous year.