

WEST LONG BRANCH

Female officer wins \$1.5M verdict in sex discrimination case

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For The Star-Ledger

A jury Wednesday awarded \$1.5 million to a police officer who claimed she was passed over for promotion due to her gender and subjected to a hostile workplace, her attorney said.

Marlowe Botti alleged in her lawsuit that she was removed from the detective bureau and denied a promotion because she is a woman.

"We are extremely grateful that this jury sat and listened to weeks of testimony and swept aside all of West Long Branch's contrivances and falsehoods," said Charles J. Sciarra, of Sciarra and Catrambone, of Clifton.

"The politicians of West Long Branch could have avoided this outcome if they did the right thing originally or quickly rectified the situation after the original discrimination."

Botti joined the West Long Branch force in 2004 and received positive performance reviews before joining the detective bureau in 2008, according to court papers.

She worked in the bureau with one fellow officer, William Lynch, for more than a year before becoming romantically involved with another officer whom she

would eventually marry.

The working relationship between Lynch and Botti soured when she became involved with the other officer, the suit claims, and she was removed from the bureau "with discriminatory intent" while Lynch remained. She was also placed on a midnight shift "despite her seniority."

Chief Arthur Cosentino later tried to recommend Lynch for a promotion to sergeant without a testing process, but in 2011, patrol officers were told there would be a test for the rank, per the borough council.

Botti, Lynch and four other officers tested for the position and Botti received the highest score. She was also told she did "very well" on a second phase of the testing but was ultimately awarded a low overall score, resulting in Lynch having the highest overall score. He was promoted in March 2012.

Botti requested a ranking of the candidates for sergeant but the borough declined to release one, the suit states.

Later, in a private meeting, Botti said Cosentino made her feel threatened. She said he yelled and threw an object at the wall.

Botti, who was promoted to sergeant in 2016, received \$521,000 in compensatory damages and \$1 million in punitive damages.

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