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By Frank Freed Subit & Thomas LLP

After more than three years, the case of Debi Humann, the former City of Edmonds Human Resources Director, has finally come to a close. Humann charged the City of Edmonds, former Mayor Michael Cooper, and current Mayor Dave Earling with wrongful termination, denial of her First Amendment rights, defamation, and retaliation. Humann was represented by Attorneys [Beth Barrett Bloom](#) and [Jillian M. Cutler](#) of Frank, Freed, Subit & Thomas LLP.

The unlawful retaliation stemmed from Humann's cooperation with a Washington State Auditor's Office investigation in 2011. After a complaint from an anonymous whistleblower, the state auditor's office began to look into accusations of public funds being used to pay the \$79,000 salary of Cooper's executive assistant. It was stated that the executive assistant had not worked all of the time written on her time sheets, that she had used unearned vacation time, and that Cooper had approved payments knowing all of this.

Humann had cooperated with the State Auditor and had turned over the executive assistant's time sheets, which had been signed and approved by Cooper. Per court papers, Humann was called into Cooper's office and fired the very next day. Cooper claimed he could no longer trust Humann. He then sent out a news release implying that it was Humann who had engaged in misconduct. This false statement was reproduced in numerous publications.

In 2011, Cooper was defeated by Dave Earling who took office in December of that year. Cooper's executive assistant was immediately dismissed upon Earling becoming mayor. Earling reviewed Humann's claim against Cooper and reinstated her as the Human Resources Director. However, after two weeks, she was "laid off" as a "cost-cutting measure."

Humann's trial lasted for three weeks and concluded in November 2014. A jury found that Humann had been wrongfully terminated and that she had been retaliated against for filing a complaint. It was also found that Cooper had defamed Humann for statements made in the press. Human was awarded a total of \$1,035,351. Following this successful trial, Humann and her legal team filed a motion to recover another \$1 million to cover her attorney's fees and related expenses. On June 17, 2015, the U.S. District Court ordered that the City and Cooper pay Humann that money. [Click here if you would like to read the full judgment.](#)

Commenting on the outcome of the trial, lead trial counsel Beth Barrett Bloom praised the jury's decision. "Debi Humann is exactly the kind of government employee we want guarding our taxpayer dollars. She did the right thing at great personal cost."

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