

Jury hears EMT abuse case

\$5 million lawsuit | A victim's lawyer says American Medical Response ignored other patients' complaints about Lannie Haszard

By **AIMEE GREEN**
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The attorney representing a woman who was molested by paramedic Lannie Haszard in the back of an ambulance told a jury Tuesday that American Medical Response repeatedly ignored signs that the company had a sexual predator on its staff.



Haszard
Serving five years
for groping patients

Greg Kafoury, attorney for 29-year-old Royshekka Herring, argued that if AMR had acted on three earlier complaints by female patients, his client would not have been molested in December 2007.

Haszard, an EMT or paramedic of 16 years, pleaded guilty and was sentenced in August 2008 for groping Herring and three other female patients. Herring is suing the ambulance company for \$5 million in Multnomah County Circuit Court.

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tor who worked out of the back of an ambulance," Kafoury said. "It's about the woman — Royshekka Herring — who stopped him and the corporation that didn't."

James Dumas, an attorney representing AMR Northwest, which is based in Portland and its parent company AMR, strongly disputed Kafoury's claims. Dumas said none of the first three women who complained about Haszard offered clear and convincing accounts, even though he said that AMR Northwest did its best to investigate.

Dumas also said Haszard was an expert at covering up his crimes, as sex predators often are.

"AMR had absolutely no reason, no incentive ... to allow a sex abuser to work on their staff," Dumas said.

Kafoury described the three earlier incidents in which women complained about Haszard in opening statements this week.

In February 2006, a 35-year-old woman said Haszard stared at her, panted and sweated while a hospital worker undressed her. Unable to speak because she was having trouble breathing, she was unable to tell him to leave. She testified that an AMR manager later told her that she must have imagined things.

In December 2006, a 73-year-old woman who was having heart problems said Haszard cupped her breasts and slid his hand up under her gown and up her inner thigh, asking her questions such as "Are you hot?"

In March 2007, a 40-year-old woman found lying near Barbur Boulevard covered in blood said that Haszard stuck his hand down her pants. The woman complained to police, who decided not to make an arrest. Kafoury said AMR managers failed to seek out the woman and interview her for themselves.

In each case, Kafoury said, AMR failed to discipline Haszard or take him off the job.

In December 2007, Herring arrived at the hospital screaming, saying the paramedic had stuck his hand down her underwear and fondled her.

Portland police arrested Haszard two days later. He was sentenced to five years in prison. Prosecutors believed there were other victims, including a woman who died before charges were brought.

Kafoury said AMR discounted the words of the first three women who complained because the com-

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pany chose to believe Haszard's accounts over the women's.

Dumas said in the case of the first woman, there was another explanation for the way the paramedic appeared as she was undressed. Dumas said Haszard could have been sweating and panting "because he was an old out-of-shape paramedic who just got done wheeling a patient to the hospital."

In the case of the 73-year-old who complained about Haszard fondling her breasts and inner thigh, Dumas said Haszard's partner, who was driving the ambulance, didn't see any inappropriate touching and heard the woman laughing.

Dumas said the third woman to complain had been drinking, and another one of Haszard's partners said she was periodically glancing into the back of the ambulance while

driving. She said Haszard couldn't have molested the patient.

In Herring's case, Dumas said, AMR was so swift to act that one of its managers arrived at the hospital before police did.

"He got there before the police did because that's the kind of company that AMR is," Dumas said.

Dumas said Haszard resigned, just as the ambulance company was about to tell him he was fired.

Herring's suit against the ambulance company is the first of five to go to trial. Kafoury had wanted to try four of the cases together, but Judge Judith Matarazzo ordered the trials separated. A fifth woman is represented by another attorney.

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