

Woman testifies in ambulance abuse case

AMR lawsuit | Royshekka Herring says she is proud to help stop the ex-paramedic

By AIMEE GREEN
THE OREGONIAN

A 29-year-old woman said she was proud she helped stop a paramedic who molested her in the back of an ambulance because after she reported what happened to police, 18 other women said they had been sexually victimized as well.

In her testimony before a Multnomah County jury Monday, Royshekka Herring said it had been incredibly difficult to speak in criminal court about how American Medical Response employee Lannie Haszard had rubbed her genitals. But she had to – even with TV cameras rolling – in order to keep him in jail pending his criminal trial, she said.

“You don’t want to speak about something sexual,” Herring said. “That’s not what you want to be on TV about.”

Haszard was sentenced last year to five years in prison, and now Herring is suing the ambulance company, American Medical Response, for \$5 million. She claims that if AMR had acted on the complaints of three other

women starting nearly two years earlier, Haszard never would have abused her in December 2007. He wouldn’t have been working.

“He should not have been in the back (of the ambulance) with any other women after the first complaint,” Herring said.

An attorney for Portland-based AMR Northwest and its parent company AMR said none of the first three women offered a convincing account, even though company managers did their best to investigate.

Herring’s testimony Monday came in the second week of the civil trial in Multnomah County Circuit Court. The trial is expected to conclude at the end of this week.

One of the three other women who complained before Herring’s assault said that Haszard seemed sexually excited as he stared while a nurse undressed her at the hospital. Two others said Haszard groped their breasts, inner thighs or genitals.

Herring’s attorney, Greg Kafoury, said his office tracked down 108 of 579 women transported by Haszard from 2004 to 2007. Eighteen of them said Haszard had acted sexually inappropriately around them, too.

Five women are suing the ambulance company. Herring’s is the first case to go to trial.

Herring said she was a different person before the sexual assault. She was a happy, hard-working, single

mother of three who was engaged to be married to a U.S. soldier serving in Iraq. Since the assault, she said she has panic attacks, has been afraid to leave her house and has broken up with her fiancé.

She said she has instructed her oldest child what to do if she needs an ambulance again.

“I tell my son ‘If it ever happens again, don’t dial 9-1-1,’” Herring said, instructing him to instead get a neighbor to drive her to the hospital.

“I don’t want to be in an ambulance ever.”

The images of what happened keep playing in her mind and have made it difficult for her to hold down jobs as a bookkeeper and later as a courier, she said.

“He started touching my private area,” said Herring, who was semi-conscious as she rode in the ambulance. “He went as low as he could. I remember telling myself to stop him. ‘Scream!’ I couldn’t do anything.

“I remember looking over at him. Looking at his badge, so I could see his name,” she said. “I felt like I was paralyzed. I couldn’t speak.”

Once at the hospital, Herring screamed and insisted that someone call Portland police. She said she remembers talking to an AMR supervisor at the hospital that day.

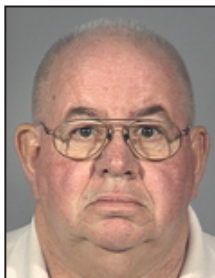
“I explained what happened,” Herring said. “And I said, ‘Promise me he’s not going to work for you anymore.’ And he said, ‘I can’t.’”

Herring said she asked the supervisor to call police, and he said he wouldn’t.

On cross examination, AMR’s attorney, James Dumas, asked Herring if she knew that the supervisor had indeed been the one to call police. She said she hadn’t realized that until recently.

Herring’s attorney, however, said records show that a social worker at the hospital told the supervisor to summon police.

Dumas said supervisors were planning on firing Haszard when they met with him two days later. Instead, Haszard resigned and was arrested.



Haszard
Serving five years
for molestation



Royshekka Herring, who was molested in the back of an AMR ambulance, describes the experience in Multnomah County Circuit Court on Monday. She says she told her son that if she is ever that sick again, not to call 9-1-1.

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