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**Contact:**

Amy Collett

229.420.1723 ext. 11

[amy@langstaffmarketing.com](mailto:amy@langstaffmarketing.com)

**\$600,000.00 awarded in Sexual Harassment Case against Decatur County**

(Albany, GA) - Cindy Harrell, represented by Attorney Louis Hatcher with Watson Spence, has reached a settlement with Decatur County, Georgia in a lawsuit filed by her last year in the Albany Division of the United States Middle District of Georgia. The County's insurer, Association County Commissioners of Georgia ("ACCG"), agreed to pay \$600,000.00 to settle Ms. Harrell's claims that she was the victim of repeated sexual harassment by her male co-workers at Decatur County Fire & Rescue. Prior to Ms. Harrell's settlement, the most ACCG had ever paid to settle sexual harassment claims was \$85,000.00. Ms. Harrell is the only female ever to work at Decatur County Fire & Rescue.

"Decatur County and ACCG understand we know how to try a case; they underestimated us once, and I doubt they want to do that again." Hatcher was referring to a case he tried against Decatur County last April on behalf of three firefighters who were retaliated against when they supported the efforts of Michelle Lagace to try to become the first woman ever hired to work at Decatur County Fire & Rescue. Ms. Lagace was denied employment despite being imminently more qualified than the males chosen in her stead. Hatcher settled her case for \$175,000.00.

Jimmy Bellflower, Steve Enfinger, and Guy Yates were Decatur County firefighters who supported Ms. Lagace in her EEOC charge of discrimination, and the men were the subject of unfounded disciplinary actions, including suspensions without pay. Although the men were later reimbursed the time off without pay, Decatur County refused to clear their names of the false accusations made against them. ACCG offered \$30,000.00 to each plaintiff on the eve of trial. Although the plaintiffs did not have any lost wages or other special damages, the jury returned a verdict of \$750,000.00, or \$250,000.00 to each plaintiff. "ACCG informed us we had the fourth highest verdict ever against an ACCG insured, regardless of the nature of

the case," stated Hatcher. "The most important thing to us was the jury's resounding declaration of wrongdoing on the part of Decatur County, and the unequivocal clearing of the men's good names."

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