Bikram Yoga Sexual Harassment Case

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Greene Broillet & Wheeler partner, Mark Quigley, obtained a significant result for his client (Minakshi Jafa-Bodden) in a recent case against Bikram yoga founder, Bikram Choudhury. The case resulted in an award of $924,000 in unpaid compensation to Ms. Jafa-Bodden and additional punitive damages of nearly $6.5 million.

The trial exposed the sexually hostile work environment effectuated by Yoga Guru Bikram Choudhury against women in the workplace, and included claims for retaliation, wrongful termination and sexual harassment by Plaintiff Micki Bodden, who attempted to investigate and stop Mr. Choudhury's illegal conduct. Ms. Bodden was employed by Choudhury's various yoga entities as the Head of Legal and International Affairs in 2011 and was abruptly terminated in 2013.

Ms. Bodden was both the victim of, and witness to, Mr. Choudhury's severe, pervasive and even dangerous conduct towards women. Mr. Quigley successfully argued at trial that his client was fired for refusing to cover up and cease her investigation into several allegations by young women that Choudhury had sexually assaulted them. The jury also made a unanimous finding of malice/oppression/fraud and returned a punitive damages award of roughly $6.4 million to punish Mr. Choudhury for his despicable conduct. Mr. Quigley received the Elite Trial Lawyers Award in 2016 for his work on this case from The National Law Journal.

Jury Awards Punitive Damages of $6.5M to Victim of Celebrity Bikram Yoga Founder

LOS ANGELES, CA (January 26, 2016) – A Los Angeles Superior Court jury this afternoon awarded a former employee-turned-whistleblower $6,471,878 in punitive damages in a retaliation and wrongful termination lawsuit against famed yoga instructor, Bikram Choudhury. The punitive award comes one day after the same jury awarded the plaintiff $924,500 in compensatory damages.

Outside the Stanley Mosk Courthouse in Downtown Los Angeles, jurors hugged the plaintiff and her attorneys, thanking her for standing up for victims of sexual harassment and saying she felt 'like family.' Lead Plaintiff Attorney Mark Quigley, of the El Segundo law firm Greene Broillet & Wheeler, argued that his client was fired from her six-figure job for refusing to cover up an investigation into a student's allegation that Choudhury raped her. "It's about time somebody stood up to this defendant and it's too bad it took a jury," Quigley said.

"This is a good day for women," said plaintiff Minakshi 'Miki' Jafa-Bodden. "I'm so thankful for the jury and my lawyers for standing up for what's right."

Jafa-Bodden worked as Head of Legal and International Affairs at Choudhury Los Angeles School from Spring 2011 to March 13, 2013 when she was "abruptly and unlawfully terminated."

69-year-old Choudhury has amassed a fortune as the founder of Bikram Yoga, a form of hot yoga performed in a series of 26 hatha yoga postures performed in an environment heated to 104 °F.

“Jafa-Bodden faced retaliation and intimidation when she refused to stay silent about witnessing illegal behavior,” said Quigley.

During the two years that Jafa-Bodden worked closely with Choudhury, she testified that she was both the victim of and witness to his “severe, ongoing, pervasive and offensive conduct” towards women. Five women have sued Choudhury for sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Two lawsuits accuse Choudhury of rape. One of the plaintiffs alleges sexual battery, false imprisonment, discrimination, harassment and other counts in addition to the rape allegation. Jane Doe’s lawsuit describes a cult-like atmosphere where members of Bikram’s inner circle help him find young women to assault.

The plaintiff’s trial team included Mark Quigley and Aaron Osten of Greene Broillet & Wheeler, along with Carla Minnard of the Minnard Law Firm.