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JURY AWARDS FIRE RECRUIT 2.46 MILLION IN SEX DISCRIMINATION SUIT AGAINST FRESNO FIRE DEPARTMENT

(Fresno, CA) - Jurors reached a verdict late Friday night in a closely watched sex discrimination trial against the Fresno Fire Department, finding in favor of Fire Recruit Michelle Maher and awarding her 2.46 million in damages.

The jury found that the Fresno Fire Department discriminated against Maher, who was the only woman in her 2005 recruit class, when it kicked her out of the fire training academy. The Fire Department could not side-step convincing evidence that it held Maher to a higher standard than male recruits. Maher, who is a professional-caliber athlete, was told that she could not be successful in the fire department as a mother. Multiple individuals testified that the man responsible for evaluating Ms. Maher and the other recruits said women do not belong in the Fire Service.

After the verdict, one juror embraced Maher and said, "If my son were trapped in a burning building, I would want you to be the fire fighter to save him." Maher was overjoyed at the verdict: "I felt numb, for the past few years I have been telling my story over and over again. Now I can finally move on with my life."

Maher was represented by Equal Rights Advocates, a national non-profit based in San Francisco and East Bay law firm Siegel & Yee.

Siegel & Yee attorney Jessica Albert said, "Women serve in combat, at some point soon a woman will be president, and women are highly successful firefighters. It will take leadership to break through old stereotypes and increase the number of women in the Fresno Fire Department. This has not happened yet but hopefully now it will."

ERA attorney Luz Mayberg said, "Up until now, Fresno Fire Department has refused to accept responsibility for its discriminatory actions. We hope that this award sends a message to fire departments across the nation that the days of excluding women from the fire service are over."

Siegel & Yee is a 30-year old law firm that specializes in civil rights and other civil litigation. Founded in 1974, Equal Rights Advocates works to protect and secure equal rights and economic opportunities for all women through advocacy, education and litigation.