Proskauer

Another California “Thermonuclear” Verdict: $105 Million to Employee Who Reported Workplace Harassment

California Employment Law Update on **June 8, 2026**

DATELINE: California—where apparently $100 million verdicts are becoming so common that they barely qualify as news anymore.

As we have previously reported, California juries continue to hand down “nuclear” and even “thermonuclear” employment verdicts at an alarming rate. The latest addition to that growing list comes from San Diego, where a jury awarded a former substance abuse counselor $105 million after concluding she was terminated for reporting workplace harassment, a hidden camera, and patient safety violations.

The jury found in the employee’s favor and returned the latest staggering verdict, including $70 million in punitive damages.

If recent trends are any indication, California’s era of “thermonuclear” employment verdicts is far from over. Indeed, a $105 million employment retaliation verdict that once would have dominated headlines now feels almost routine in a litigation environment where juries are increasingly comfortable awarding lottery-sized amounts to allegedly wronged employees.

Whether this particular verdict survives post-trial scrutiny remains to be seen – we’ll continue to monitor developments. In the meantime, those employers who are still prepared to test their luck in front of a California jury might think again and adopt arbitration before it’s too late.

Related Professionals

- **Anthony J. Oncidi**
  Partner
- **Michelle L. Lappen**

Associate