

Drug Center Suit Called Precedent

ALEXANDRIA (AP) — A 20-year-old awarded \$220,000 in damages for being held against his will by Straight, Inc. says his victory sends the drug rehabilitation center a message.

"I think we set the precedent that's going to tell Straight that they can't lock people up anymore," said Fred Collins after the award by a U.S. District Court jury Wednesday.

Collins, of Fairfax, said the award

tells Straight that "that they're not above the law . . . that they're held liable for their actions."

The jury deliberated about three hours before returning the award in the suit brought against Straight by Collins, who had asked \$750,000 in damages.

The jury two weeks ago found that Collins was held against his will at Straight's St. Petersburg, Fla., facili-

ty last June. Straight was exonerated of Collins' charge that he was physically and mentally abused.

Collins, who has denied ever having a drug habit, asked compensatory damages for loss of the family financial support for college and money to pay for psychiatric treatment for emotional problems coming from the treatment.

The jury awarded him \$40,000 in compensatory damages and \$180,000 in punitive damages.

Collins' attorney, Philip J. Hirschkop, on Wednesday urged the jury to assess large damages against Straight, arguing there was a pattern of illegal detention at the group's clinics in St. Petersburg and Springfield, near here.

"Kidnapping and false imprisonment are felonies," Hirschkop said. He also said Straight officials "repeatedly ignored Florida state law, locking people in rooms and threatening to commit others to mental institutions."

"Only a substantial monetary award would prevent them from continuing such policies," Hirschkop said.

Straight attorney Ronald Goldfarb called Collins a "con artist."

"He is no Patty Hearst or Bruce Laingen, held hostage by terrorists," Goldfarb said.

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