## Court upholds judgment against Straight Inc.

By HELEN HUNTLEY St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

A federal appeals court last week upheld a \$220,000 judgment against Straight Inc. for keeping a college

student in the drug-treatment program against his will. However, a Straight official said Monday the organi-

zation probably will appeal the ruling. A federal jury awarded the judgment in May 1983 to Fred Collins, who said he was forced into treatment when he went to visit his brother, then a client in Straight's St. Petersburg program. Collins was held for four months at Straight facilities in St. Petersburg and Virginia until he escaped.

The jurors said Collins should receive \$40,000 in

compensatory damages and \$180,000 in punitive damages - intended to punish Straight for its actions. The lawsuit was tried in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va.

Straight Inc. took the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., claiming that the trial judge made mistakes in his instructions to the jury. In a split decision, a three-judge panel for the appeals court rejected Straight's arguments. One judge wrote a dissenting opinion, saying the Florida Supreme Court should be consulted for an interpretation of Florida law relevant to the case.

"I'm very happy and my client is even happier," said Philip J. Hirschkop, Collins' lawyer.

He said Collins is now a senior at Virginia Polytechnic

Institute and is thinking of going to law school.

"We're disappointed, but we're not through with the fight," said Straight executive director William Oliver. He said Straight may ask for the case to be reconsidered by the full court of appeals. A second option would be to appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Collins is neither the first nor the last Straight client to claim he was forced into treatment. A state investigation last summer found Straight holding young people against their will and coercing or tricking them into

consenting to treatment. Threatened with the loss of the state license to operate a drug program, Straight officials have since agreed to comply with state law that gives clients, including children, the right to accept or refuse treatment.



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