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## Cook jury awards woman's family \$3M

### Suit in slaying alleged Chicago police violated Domestic Violence Act

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A Cook County jury ordered the city of Chicago to pay \$3 million to the family of a woman who was strangled to death a day after police failed to detain her live-in boyfriend for allegedly threatening her with a samurai sword and a butcher knife.

The award in favor of Vanessa Taylor's estate is the highest under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act of 1986 that the Jury Verdict Reporter has reported.

A 12-member jury in Cook County Associate Judge Israel A. Desierto's court returned the verdict on Thursday.

The lead attorney for the estate, Richard Dvorak of Dvorak Law Offices LLC in Willowbrook, maintained Taylor suffered "a horrible ordeal" because police did not do enough to try to keep her safe from James E. Thomas.

"We believe the officers' actions were willful and wanton," Dvorak said.

The award includes \$750,000 for the pain and suffering Taylor experienced and an additional \$750,000 for her emotional distress. It also includes compensatory damages for her five children.

Although Taylor had a job in

the retail industry, the estate did not seek lost earnings.

One night in June 2015, police officers responding to a 911 call found Thomas in Taylor's West Side apartment making Molotov cocktails and wielding a sword and knife, according to the suit that was later filed.

The suit maintained the officers used a Taser to subdue Thomas and then took him to Stroger Hospital for a mental evaluation. The officers took Taylor to the hospital too rather than allowing her to remain at home, the suit maintained.

The suit contended one of Taylor's sons told the officers that his mother had a black eye inflicted by Thomas. The doctor who treated Thomas and three other people who worked at the hospital also saw the bruise, the suit alleged.

But the officers denied the son said anything about a black eye. They also maintained they did not see a bruise on Taylor's face.

The suit alleged the officers left the hospital without informing the treating physician about the Molotov cocktails or the weapons and without waiting for the result of the evaluation.

Without that information, the suit contended, the physi-

cian was not aware of the danger Thomas posed to others. The physician sent Thomas home with Taylor a few hours after he was admitted, according to the suit.

A day after Thomas was sent home, the suit contended, Taylor called 911 screaming for help. Operators were unable to trace the call, the suit said.

About 45 minutes later, the suit alleged, another of Taylor's sons got Facebook messages sent by Thomas from Taylor's cellphone accusing her of being a member of the Mob and of trying to kill him. The messages said Thomas had killed her instead.

Police responding to the son's 911 call found Thomas in Taylor's apartment holding a knife. The officers used a Taser to subdue him and then found Taylor's body in another room. She had been strangled with a computer cord.

Thomas was charged with murder and aggravated assault on a police officer. He was found to be mentally unfit to stand trial after his arrest and has not been found fit since then. He is being held by the Illinois Department of Human Services for psychiatric treatment.

The suit filed on behalf of Taylor's estate maintained the officers violated the Domestic Violence Act by failing to arrest Thomas or to separate



**Richard Dvorak**

him from Taylor. The officers also ran afoul of the act by not telling Taylor about the services available to her or advising her to seek an order of protection, the suit alleged.

And the suit alleged a further violation of the act was the officers' failure to wait at the hospital while Thomas was being evaluated.

The case is *Steven Taylor v. City of Chicago*, No. 18-L-3145

Dvorak described Taylor as an "amazing woman" who earned a bachelor's degree and raised three sons and two daughters.

Taylor's estate also is represented by Adrian J. Bleifuss Prados of the Dvorak firm and Basileios "Bill" J. Foutris of Foutris Law Office Ltd.

James F. Ormond and Shilpa A. Patel, both of the Chicago Corporation Counsel's Office, represented the city at trial.

The Law Department declined to comment.