

Correctional officer files complaint against judge
By Crystal Carreon
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Michael Mohr walks the concrete corridors of California State Prison, Sacramento, in Folsom. As a correctional officer, he has to keep his senses alert, his reflexes acute.

He didn't expect to be "assaulted," he said, by a judge.

But Mohr said he found himself in that position last week, when he came before Commissioner Christopher Longaker in Sacramento's small claims court.

Mohr's claim: mental anguish caused by a convicted murderer serving life who hurled bodily fluids – known in prison as "gassing" – at the officer last fall.

Mohr said he decided to sue the inmate to send the message that these attacks will not be tolerated.

But inside Department 87 at the Carol Miller Justice Center, Mohr claimed, Longaker saw things differently.

The commissioner called Mohr's claim "laughable" and said it was in Mohr's job description to expect to be assaulted and "slapped around," the prison officer recalled.

Longaker said through a courthouse spokeswoman this week that it was inappropriate to comment.

Ginger Sylvester, the spokeswoman, said Longaker could not address the specific allegations, but she stressed that "judicial officers always strive to treat litigants with courtesy, dignity and respect," and any complaint will be investigated.

At last week's hearing, Longaker ruled in Mohr's favor, awarding him \$1,500 in damages. But Mohr felt the victory was short-lived.

"I left feeling more assaulted than I was by the inmate," he said.

He has filed a complaint with the Commission on Judicial Performance in San Francisco.

Bob Maroun, a coordinator with the California Staff Assault Task Force, a nonprofit group that supports officers' claims, was in court with Mohr during his hearing on March 5. He said the commissioner's remarks left him speechless.

"In my four years in this organization, we have never heard a judge say, 'This is your job, if you don't like your job, do another job,' " Maroun said. "It's a hazardous-duty job we take on. Yes, it is, but nobody has a right to be assaulted."

Maroun said, on average, 9.8 correctional staff members are assaulted or injured by inmates every day.

He said the task force exists to help officers defend their rights by taking inmates to civil or small claims court. An asset check is conducted, and if a court rules an inmate must pay, money could come out of the inmate's wages or a prison account supported by relatives.