

## Court Victory is first for Programmers

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Court victory is a first for cell-phone programmers

Sharesa Price thought it was just another in a series of sinus infections. Her head and eyes hurt, and she was vomiting. But then Price had a seizure, and a brain scan found something far more troubling.

"When I got home, the phone was ringing. It was the doctor's office, and they told me, 'Brace yourself. Honey, you have a brain tumor.' I was standing by the refrigerator, and I just collapsed, saying, 'no, no, no, it can't be a brain tumor,'" she recalled.

After her diagnosis in 1999 and surgery to remove most of the tumor, Price started looking for answers. She became convinced that exposure to radio-frequency radiation on the job, where she programmed cell phones for new customers, had caused the tumor.

In May, an administrative law judge who handles worker's compensation claims awarded her \$30,000 to pay her medical bills and other expenses. Price may be the first person to convince a judge that her illness was caused by radio-frequency radiation. The decision is unlikely to have widespread repercussions for the cell phone industry, however, because the settlement was small.

Price's customers at Advanced Communications Systems in northern California were doctors, firefighters, police departments and security departments for casinos, and she loved her work. She used a cell phone several hours each day, and the room in which she worked contained transmitters that emitted radio-frequency radiation, she said.

Price said when she filed a workers comp claim, her boss fired her, eliminating her health insurance. Then she lost the case. The Native American single mother of two daughters was devastated. She turned to Tribal Health, a government health agency for Native Americans, to get anti-seizure medication.

"If I hadn't been Indian, I would have died," she said.

Her former boss, Dave Bohlen, said that he did not fire Price, that she quit based on her doctor's advice that she not return to work there. Bohlen said he dropped the insurance because she was no longer an employee. He called her worker's comp case "frivolous" and said there was no proof her tumor was caused by working in his small shop.

"There's nothing harmful going on here," he said.

After Price recovered from brain surgery, she went to the Internet and found researchers studying the biological effects of radio-frequency radiation, and got to know them.

"I would call them up and say, 'You are absolutely dead on. If a rat could talk, this is what it would say. I'm the human rat.' "

Price couldn't find an attorney to take her case until she contacted Carl Hilliard, a semi-retired lawyer and president of the Wireless Consumers Alliance, a California-based consumer-advocacy group. Hilliard volunteered to represent her pro bono and re-filed her workers comp case.

Hilliard said his group has represented cell phone users in issues involving poor service, billing problems and misrepresentations by cell phone service providers.