

The Star-Ledger

\$1.00 | TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

FINAL EDITION

NJ.COM

NJ Transit cops win \$5.8M in bias suit

10 minority officers claim use of slurs by ex-chief

By Mike Frassinelli
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

New Jersey Transit has agreed to pay 10 of its minority police officers \$5.8 million to settle a discrimination lawsuit against the agency alleging they endured racial insults and slurs from their chief dating back 10 years.

The transit police officers complained their former chief referred to African-Americans as "Stepin Fetchit" or "Knuckles," because gorillas drag their knuckles on the ground. And he often used the "N" word and other demeaning terms.

A lawyer for the plaintiffs said the settlement could be a record for the state.

One black officer said the ex-chief refused to shake his hand during a promotion ceremony. Another said that instead of getting an award for stopping a carjacking during a blizzard, he got written up because he had a fender bender during the arrest.

The lawyer for the officers said the settlement could be a record for a discrimination case against a New Jersey public agency. Details of the settlement were announced yesterday by the lawyer, Nancy Erika Smith of Montclair, and confirmed by NJ Transit.

The suit was brought by nine African-American officers and one Latino officer.

"The behavior is so egregious, so pervasive and so well-documented, and the cancer in this organization was so obvious, that to try the case in front of the jury would have been devastating to the state," said Smith, who had represented the plaintiffs along with her co-counsel, Kevin Barber of Morristown.

Smith said that when she read the complaints, "I felt like I was going down to Georgia in 1960."

At the center of the case was former
SEE NJTRANSIT, PAGE 4

