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Jury Finds for Bykofsky in Defamation Suit Against Inquirer, Columnist

The suit stems from comments Saffron, a Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture columnist, made about a 2011 column Bykofsky wrote, which she described as “the infamous column about his taste for child prostitutes in Thailand.”

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Communications and Media



Max Mitchell
Bureau Chief

A Philadelphia jury has found that former Daily News columnist [Stu Bykofsky](#) was defamed during his combative 2019 retirement party.

The suit that the former columnist filed against The Philadelphia Inquirer and Inga Saffron, a Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture columnist, stems from comments Saffron made about a 2011 column Bykofsky wrote, which she called “the infamous column about his taste for child prostitutes in Thailand.” After media outlets both [locally](#) and [nationally](#) reported on Saffron’s comments, which were recorded, Bykofsky sued Saffron and the paper.

On Wednesday, a jury determined [Bykofsky](#) had been defamed, and awarded the former columnist \$45,000 in compensatory damages. The jury also found that, while the newspaper did not engage in outrageous conduct, Saffron had, amounting to an additional \$1,000 in punitive damages.

Attorneys Jason Pearlman and Mark Schwartz represented Bykofsky during the weeklong trial in Judge Glynnis Hill’s courtroom.

“The big thing is we cleared his name,” Schwartz said. “This could have been ended for an apology a long time ago.”

Echoing similar sentiments, Pearlman added, “The jury’s verdict represents vindication for Mr. Bykofsky. This dispute could have been resolved years ago with a simple apology, but this verdict of 12 jurors is much more meaningful to Stu. He’s accomplished exactly what he set out to do, which is to restore his good name.”

In an emailed statement, Sabrina Ram, vice president of communications for The Inquirer, said, “We thank the jury for their service and respect their decision. We will be evaluating our next steps.”

Eli Segal of LeVan Stapleton Segal Cochran tried the case for The Inquirer.

The litigation itself has been contentious, spawning numerous challenges from the Inquirer and a [second lawsuit](#).

Bykofsky sued in March 2020, and soon after the paper sought to have the case, *Bykofsky v. The Philadelphia Inquirer*, dismissed. However, in December 2020, Judge James Crumlish overruled The Inquirer’s preliminary objections. Although the defendants had argued Saffron’s comments were only opinions and that they were about Bykofsky’s column—rather than about Bykofsky himself—Crumlish said nothing in her comments suggested they were strictly opinions.

The Inquirer also filed a summary judgment motion over the summer, arguing the case must be tossed because many other readers had similar impressions about Bykofsky’s 2011 column, and because Bykofsky gave footage of Saffron’s comments to Philadelphia Magazine without placing restrictions on its use.

Falcon Sean Kennedy denied the summary judgment request.

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In June, the paper also sued Bykofsky, alleging the retired writer breached the non-disparagement clause in the separation agreement he signed with the company when he shared videos of the combative retirement party and commented on the event to news outlets.

In his pretrial memo, Bykofsky argued that despite Saffron's "long-time distaste for and animus directed towards" him, she was still invited to speak during his retirement party.

The Inquirer, however, contended in its pretrial memo that Bykofsky's column was "ambiguous" and had "sparked ongoing criticism from some readers, who interpreted it as expressing a positive attitude toward the participation of children in the Thai sex industry."

"[E]ven if Saffron's interpretation of the Thai Column was somehow flat-out wrong, what she said still would not be 'materially false.' That is because she did not paint Bykofsky in any worse light than the facts that discovery has revealed about what Bykofsky did in Thailand and what he wrote to his friend there in the years after his trip," the memo said, referring to Bykofsky's deposition testimony saying he had paid to have sex with a prostitute, who he believed to be 26 at the time, during his 2011 trip to Thailand.

Bykofsky had countered that argument at the summary judgment stage, saying in court papers the allegations were "entirely different from defendant Saffron's false statement that he had a taste for child prostitutes. To the contrary, he testified that his understanding was that, unlike the law against child prostitution there, that the law about adult prostitution had fallen into disuse and was not adhered to."

According to court papers, the final demand in the case was \$750,000.

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