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Former aldermanic candidate wins \$1.4M in defamation suit over campaign mailers



Ald. Lamont Robinson, 4th, listens during a City Council meeting on May 24, 2023, at City Hall. (Brian Cassella/Chicago Tribune)



By **A.D. QUIG** | aquig@chicagotribune.com | Chicago Tribune

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South Side Ald. Lamont Robinson's campaign and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle's 4th Ward Democratic Organization are on the hook for \$1.475 million in punitive damages over what a Cook County jury found were defamatory mailers and text messages during the 2023 aldermanic campaign.

Ebony Lucas, a real estate attorney who lost in the first round of the aldermanic elections in the ward that includes Hyde Park, [filed suit in December 2023](#) over what she described as a "coordinated smear campaign" alleging she had a series of unpaid liens and fines related to her business and violations of the city's landlord tenant ordinance.

Preckwinkle's organization paid for three mailers alleging Lucas was a "bad landlord," who "can't manage her own business" and "doesn't care about doing the right thing."

At the time, Preckwinkle defended the mailers. "They were carefully footnoted, so lots of luck to her," she told reporters in March 2023.

One of those liens, Lucas' suit claimed, was in error and she was released from it in 2021. She "never" incurred court fines for ordinance violations, nor contractor liens, her suit said.

Lucas was cleared of another allegation cited in the mailers, that she had "falsely obtained access" to a condo association's bank account. That complaint, made to the state's licensing agency for attorneys and [reported by the Tribune in 2017](#), was dismissed months later. Lucas is active and authorized to practice by the state's Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission.

Lucas argued the "sources" cited in those mailers proved those statements were false, but were used anyway, showing a "reckless disregard for the truth or falsity of the defamatory statements," according to her suit.

In a statement, Lucas thanked the jury and said their decision "is a stand for truth in our elections and a message that lies and defamation will not be tolerated in our democracy. I ran on a platform of transparency, service, and economic empowerment. I am grateful to the jury for seeing through the falsehoods and delivering justice."

Robinson said he planned to appeal. In a statement, the alderman said the suit was “politically motivated,” and that he was focused on public safety and education in the ward. “My priority is addressing the real challenges we face, not engaging in political theater.”

Lucas took issue with Robinson’s claims about “political theater.”

“It is serious. I’m a real person and I have a family, I have three children who are of voting age who saw these mailers go out about their mom and knew the information wasn’t true. My children went to school in this community so all of their families got these mailers, this is something that impacted my family in a big way,” she told the Tribune. “I don’t even plan on running again, this is not about politics.”

Scott Kastrup, Preckwinkle’s spokesman and campaign manager, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

“We strongly disagree with this verdict,” Keri-Lyn Krafthefer, the attorney for the 4th Ward Democratic Organization, told the Tribune, saying it “really blows wide open” the state’s defamation law related to political campaigning.

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“There was no finding by the jury that the organization published any information it knew to be false, and not any finding found that a statement was made with actual malice. We believe it was in error and we’re confident it will be overturned on appeal,” she said.

Lucas’ attorney, Edward Moor, said cases like these often get dismissed because the standard is so high. But in this case, “everyone agreed they completely misrepresented the facts.”

The jury found against the 4th Ward Democratic Org and Lamont Robinson for Alderman Corp, awarding \$150,000 for damage to Lucas’ reputation, \$75,000 for emotional distress, and \$1.25 million in punitive damages. Those damages would be split 50/50 between the two entities.

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