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## Abused woman awarded \$12 mil

A 94-year-old woman was awarded \$12.5 million after being sexually molested by an illegal immigrant hired as a dietary aide at Oakdale Heights of Santa Clarita, where she was a resident at the time.

“This was a very emotional trial on many different levels. The jury sent a loud message to elder-care providers who choose profit over people and ignore laws designed to protect our community’s most vulnerable members. This type of conduct will not be tolerated,” her attorney Gregory Owen said in a written statement.

Owen, with the Santa Clarita-based law firm Owen, Patterson and Owen, represented Sophie Schwartz in the five-week trial that ended Monday in Los Angeles Superior Court.

Jose Vazquez, hired by Oakdale Heights Management Corp. in April 2006, was convicted in 2008 in a plea deal for attempted rape.

Vazquez is serving an eight-year sentence. He sexually assaulted Schwartz, who suffers from dementia, in her room on Dec. 16, 2007.

Vazquez had a master key allowing him access to every resident’s room despite the absence of a valid background check and no training for dealing with elderly residents, Owen stated.

The \$12.5 million judgment — \$6 million in general damages and \$6.5 million in punitive damages — represents one of the largest verdicts ever awarded for emotional trauma without evidence of physical injury, Owen said in the statement.