



Subscribe for full app access!

Pick up a subscription for just \$16.99 for your first 13 weeks

[Subscribe now](#)

Man who won \$3M in racial discrimination suit will 'give another chance to Maine'

by **Judy Harrison**

9 hours ago



David Ako-Annan, a native of Ghana, won \$3 million in damages on Wednesday in his race discrimination lawsuit against Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center. Credit: Sawyer Loftus / BDN

The Black man who won a \$3 million verdict Wednesday from his former employer was going to advise his daughter, a recent nursing school graduate, to look for work outside of Maine rather than remain in the whitest state in the nation. He also had planned to leave.

But David Ako-Annan, a native of Ghana, changed his mind after an all-white jury found that Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center discriminated against him based on race. Jurors awarded him \$1.5 million in compensatory damages and another \$1.5 million in punitive damages.

That is largest amount of damages ever awarded in Maine in a race discrimination lawsuit, according to Ako-Annan's attorney, David Webbert of Augusta.

Ako-Annan on Thursday said that he and his family had planned to mc hope to stay in Maine.

"The message I got from the jury is they want me and my family to give another chance to Maine," he said. "So, I would be open for opportunities in Maine."

He also said that he hopes his daughter will remain in Maine.

Ako-Annan, 46, of Milford sued the hospital in October 2019 alleging that a supervisor discriminated against him because he's Black and male. The hospital denied discriminating against Ako-Annan and said that turnover at the Orono facility was high and he was not addressing concerns about his leadership there.

The jury found the hospital discriminated against Ako-Annan based on his race but not his sex. Jurors deliberated for about four hours before announcing their verdict and the award for compensatory damages. They then considered the amount of punitive damages to be awarded for about 90 minutes.



David Ako-Annan, a native of Ghana, won \$3 million in damages on Wednesday in his race discrimination lawsuit against Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center. Ako-Annan was fired in 2019 as the practice manager.

care location. He said Thursday that the jury wanted him to give Maine another chance rather than move out of state. Credit: Sawyer Loftus / BDN

Ako-Annan said Thursday that he was hopeful as the trial began on Oct. 24 that the jury would find in his favor even though there were no people of color on the jury.

"I knew that we had a case to be able to obtain a verdict [in my favor]," he said in an interview over Zoom that included Webbert. "I was nervous but I know that we had a chance."

The more time jurors deliberated, the more hopeful Ako-Annan and his legal team became.

"I felt excited about the compensatory damage award, but I was more interested in the punitive damages," he said. "The goal is to send a message, and I was waiting to see how strong that message would be. I was excited about what they came up with."

More important than the monetary award, Webbert said, was the fact that the jury found the hospital had discriminated against Ako-Annan.

"We want a Maine where there's no bias," he said. "The jurors reaffirmed that in Maine, everybody's equal."

Ako-Annan said his Christian faith and online prayer and worship services with family members in Ghana have helped him not lose hope over the past three years while the lawsuit has been pending.

The verdict in Ako-Annan's case was the second time this year that Northern Light Health has been found in federal court to have discriminated against an employee.

In February, U.S. District Judge Lance Walker ruled that Bangor psychologist and Bangor School Committee member Clare Mundell, 59, could collect \$200,000 from Acadia Hospital. Mundell had sued last year, alleging that she was paid half what her male counterparts received.

The case marked the first time any judge has interpreted Maine's Equal Pay Act since its 1949 passage. Northern Light appealed Walker's decision to the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, where it is pending. Oral arguments are scheduled for Dec. 6.



David Ako-Annan, a native of Ghana, won \$3 million in damages on Wednesday in his race discrimination lawsuit against Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center. Credit: Sawyer Loftus / BDN

EMMC had not filed a notice of appeal in Ako-Annan's case as of Thursday afternoon.

Ako-Annan graduated from the University of Maine with a Bachelor of Science degree in 2011 while working in the food service industry, for a tree removal company and at the university. Two years later, he earned a master's degree in health care management from Husson University. He earned a second master's degree in 2015 in Human Relations and Counseling. Last year, Ako-Annan was awarded a doctorate degree in International Business with a focus on health care.

"I chose to go to college at the University of Maine in Orono because I thought it was a great opportunity to achieve an excellent education and then contribute to a wonderful community of kind and caring people," he said Thursday. "I loved my job at EMMC hours, including nights and weekends, because I was so devoted to providing health care services to the people of Maine."

Ako-Annan would like to continue living and working in Maine but has not been able to find a job in his field since his firing despite an exhaustive search.

He said that he would use the damage award to pay off bills. He also hopes that his children will be able to work less to support the family and study more.

© 2022 Bangor Publishing Company.

Proudly powered by Newspack by Automattic