

# **Federal Jury Awards \$1.7 Million to Camden Housing Authority Whistleblowers**

## **How Attorneys Joseph Guzzardo and Mathew Maroney Fought to Protect Public Employees' Right to Speak Out**

Two longtime Camden Housing Authority employees believed they were doing what any honest public servant should do: report misconduct, protect taxpayer funds, and ensure the rules applied to everyone. Instead, they lost their jobs, their reputations, and years of their professional lives.

In November 2025, justice finally caught up. After nearly five years of litigation, a federal jury in Camden, New Jersey, [awarded the employees \\$1.7 million in damages](#), finding that they were unlawfully retaliated against for speaking out about corruption and misuse of public resources. The verdict, reached on November 17, 2025, represents a decisive win for whistleblowers across the country. The case was tried by [Attorney Joseph Guzzardo](#) of [Romanow Law Group](#) in collaboration with Attorney Mathew Maroney of Goldberg Miller & Rubin, P.C.

### **A Case Built on Courage and Accountability**

The plaintiffs, Gary Evangelista and Kaberia Fussell, had dedicated their careers to the Camden Housing Authority. Evangelista, a retired police officer overseeing security, and Fussell, a housing specialist, repeatedly reported what they believed to be wrongdoing at the agency. Their concerns included favoritism, theft, and irregular housing placements involving individuals connected to senior officials.

Instead of being commended, they were punished. Both were terminated in December 2018 after raising multiple red flags to leadership. Fussell was later reinstated to a different position through her union rights, but Evangelista—who was not union-protected—never regained his job. The retaliation left both with deep personal and financial losses.

When they turned to the courts, their message was simple: public employees should not be fired for telling the truth.

### **How the Legal Team Built the Case**

From the start, Attorneys Guzzardo and Maroney knew this case would demand grit and persistence. They spent years gathering documents, depositions, and testimony that painted a clear picture of retaliation. Their strategy was to connect the dots, showing that the plaintiffs' reports of wrongdoing directly triggered disciplinary action from those whose conduct they had questioned.

The evidence told a powerful story. Jurors heard how the plaintiffs reported multiple issues to senior leadership, including:

- **Illegal Housing Favoritism:** Placement of ineligible tenants with personal ties to authority officials, allowing them to skip the public housing waitlist.
- **Theft and Property Misuse:** Allegations that housing authority property was stolen or diverted for personal gain.
- **Cover-Ups and Pressure Campaigns:** Testimony that agency leadership shielded politically connected managers from discipline.
- **Retaliatory Acts:** Evangelista's termination after refusing to identify other whistleblowers for fear they would also be fired.

Attorneys Guzzardo and Maroney presented a meticulous case—complete with internal emails, recorded conversations, and corroborating witness accounts—that exposed a pattern of retaliation from within the agency.

### **A Verdict Years in the Making**

The lawsuit, [Evangelista et al. v. Housing Authority of the City of Camden et al. \(No. 20-cv-16824\)](#), took nearly five years to reach trial in federal court. Through countless hearings and motions, the defendants sought to dismiss the claims, arguing that the plaintiffs' reports were part of their official duties and not protected speech. But the court disagreed, and by the time the case reached the jury, the evidence spoke louder than the defenses.

On November 17, 2025, the jury found in favor of both plaintiffs, awarding a total of \$1,705,000 for lost wages, emotional distress, and other damages. The verdict affirmed that the Camden Housing Authority had violated their First Amendment rights by retaliating against them for protected speech.

For the plaintiffs, the verdict restored not just financial stability, but dignity. For their attorneys, it validated years of dedication to a cause that was bigger than one case—it was about defending truth itself.

### **First Amendment Retaliation and Public Employee Protections**

Cases like this highlight one of the most complex areas of civil rights law: when and how public employees are protected under the First Amendment. The courts have long recognized that government workers don't give up their right to free speech, but that protection applies only when certain legal conditions are met.

In general, speech by a public employee is protected if it:

- Addresses a matter of public concern, such as corruption, fraud, or misuse of public resources.
- Is made as a private citizen, not solely as part of their official duties.
- Results in retaliation that causes tangible harm, such as termination or demotion.

In this case, Guzzardo and Maroney successfully showed that the plaintiffs' speech met all three standards. Their reports exposed misconduct that affected taxpayers and the integrity of public housing—issues far beyond personal grievances or internal disputes.

This victory reinforces a key constitutional principle: public employers cannot silence employees simply because their honesty is inconvenient.

### **Evidence That Changed the Jury's Mind**

The trial revealed striking details that helped jurors connect emotionally with the plaintiffs' story. Among the most impactful moments was testimony from a former resident who alleged that housing authority officials had pressured her to sign a false statement discrediting the plaintiffs. When the defense suggested she was being paid to testify, she responded simply, "no"—a word that resonated with authenticity.

Jurors also heard evidence that Evangelista's firing was directly tied to his refusal to identify other whistleblowers. That refusal, he testified, stemmed from fear that those employees would also lose their jobs—a fear the jury found justified.

Through these testimonies, the plaintiffs' integrity became undeniable. As one observer noted, "They did what we expect from people entrusted with public funds—they told the truth."

### **The Emotional Cost of Retaliation**

For Evangelista and Fussell, the road to justice was long and draining. Evangelista, unable to appeal through union channels, struggled to find work after his termination. Fussell, though reinstated, faced lasting emotional tolls from the experience.

These hardships echo what many whistleblowers face: years of isolation, uncertainty, and public skepticism. But the verdict gave both plaintiffs something more than money—it gave them their reputations back.

### **A Shared Victory Built on Collaboration**

Attorney Joseph Guzzardo of Romanow Law Group handled the bulk of the trial work—opening statements, closing arguments, and cross-examination of key defendants—but he is quick to acknowledge the partnership that made the verdict possible.

"This was a true collaboration," Guzzardo said. "Attorney Mathew Maroney litigated this case for years before trial and played a critical role in preparing it for success. We shared one goal from the start: to give our clients their voices back."

That partnership between two law firms demonstrates how determined advocacy and teamwork can hold even powerful public institutions accountable.

### **The Broader Impact: Protecting Whistleblowers Nationwide**

Beyond Camden, this verdict resonates with public employees across the country who face pressure to stay silent. It reminds agencies that retaliation isn't just unethical—it's illegal. It also signals to future whistleblowers that their voices can make a difference, even when the odds seem stacked against them.

The message is simple but important: truth still has power in the courtroom. And when attorneys are willing to fight for that truth, the result can ripple far beyond one city or one case.

### **Standing Up for What's Right**

At Romanow Law Group, standing up for what's right is more than a motto—it's a mandate. Whether the case involves a catastrophic injury or a civil rights violation, our firm fights relentlessly for people who've been wronged.

Attorney Joseph Guzzardo's work in this case reflects that commitment. With over 17 years of experience handling complex litigation in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, he brings the same aggressive, results-driven approach to every courtroom battle. Together with his colleagues, Guzzardo continues to champion the rights of those who've been silenced, ignored, or underestimated.

### **Contact Romanow Law Group for Legal Help**

If you believe you've been retaliated against for reporting misconduct or exposing corruption, you don't have to face the system alone. The law protects you—and timing matters.

[Contact Romanow Law Group today](#) for a confidential consultation with an attorney who understands what's at stake. Our team stands ready to fight for your rights and restore your reputation.