

# City, park rangers settle in parity suit

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The city of Dallas has settled with 10 park rangers who filed suit in February contending that even though they were performing like regular Dallas police officers, they were treated unfairly because they were ineligible for promotions and excluded from the police and fire pension plan.

Under the settlement, the park police can become regular officers in the Dallas Police Department, can retain their rank once they make the transition and then will be eligible for promotions. The city also agreed to pay a settlement of \$60,000 for attorneys' fees and \$2,500 for court costs.

"It's a testament to these officers that they have fought for so many years and have not given up," said Rogge Dunn, an attorney representing the park rangers. He said he cut his fees to \$20,000 and gave the remainder to his clients.

"It's a good settlement for everybody concerned, for the city and for the park rangers," said Janice Moss, an assistant city attorney.

Ms. Moss said the park rangers who did not join the suit would also be eligible to make the transition.

The hybrid status of the park rangers is a throwback to the merging of the park police with the Dallas Police Department in 1986. The city currently has 13 park rangers and

three supervisors. They are paid from the city's civilian budget and are enrolled in the city's civilian pension plan, which is less lucrative than the police and fire pension plan.

Police officials have said park officers were given the opportunity after the merger to go through the regular hiring process. If hired, they could have gone through an accelerated training program but would have lost whatever rank and seniority they had as a park ranger.

Ranger Nick Novello said that he was glad to see the lawsuit settled but that he was frustrated because he believes the city allows such situations to "fester."

"This was something that should have been done a long time ago," said Ranger Novello, who wears the same uniform and patches as a Dallas police officer. "It took us hiring a lawyer to compel the city to come to the table."

Ranger Novello said he would make the transition to a regular Dallas police officer position in about three years when he is eligible to receive his civilian pension.

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