

Scientology appeal rejected

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WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court let stand Monday a ruling that could force the Church of Scientology of California to post a \$60 million bond — an amount the church said would bankrupt it — to appeal a judgment against it.

The court refused to hear arguments in the case brought by the church seeking review of a California appeals court ruling.

"We feel it's a grave injustice," said Kathleen Thorn, president of

the Church of Scientology of California.

She refused to discuss how the church would respond to the high court decision.

Superior Court Judge Ronald Swearinger, who presided over the five-month trial and refused to reduce the \$30 million jury award or waive the requirement for posting bond, said he was "satisfied" with the Supreme Court decision.

"Now the church has got to post the \$60 million or a \$45 million surety or else there will be execution on that (\$30 million) judgment," he said.

The Scientology case stems from charges brought against the church by Larry Wollersheim, a former member of the church. He sued the church for fraud and the infliction of emotional distress arising primarily from his participation in the church's equivalent of confession.

The trial court dismissed the claims the church fraudulently misrepresented the benefits of participating in the confession sessions, called auditing by the church, and failed to disclose the alleged dangerous nature of auditing.

However, the jury awarded \$5 million in compensatory damages and \$25 million in punitive damages on the emotional distress charges.

Under California law, the loser in a lawsuit must post twice the amount of judgment, \$60 million, or a surety bond of one and one-half the amount, \$45 million, to appeal the decision.

Scientologists claim such a requirement would bankrupt and destroy the church. They sought a court order halting the requirement, which the Supreme Court granted in November 1986.