

**Press Release**

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EEOC Sues Innovative Services NW for Disability Discrimination

Disability Services Organization Refused to Accommodate Employee with Disability, Federal Agency Charges

VANCOUVER, Wash. — Innovative Services NW (ISNW), a nonprofit providing programs for people with disabilities and others to build self-reliance through educational, therapeutic, and employment services, violated federal law when it refused to accommodate an employee with a degenerative hip impairment and instead fired her, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) alleged in a lawsuit filed today.

According to the EEOC's suit, Carly Romero had worked as a janitor for ISNW's Janitorial Services Program in Vancouver, Wash. for seven years, earning praise as a valued employee and strong performer by high level managers. In November 2019, Romero attempted to return to work with a doctor's release allowing her to resume janitorial activities, except for wearing a backpack vacuum. As a reasonable accommodation, Romero asked to use an upright vacuum instead. The EEOC's investigation found that even though ISNW had permitted other janitors to use upright vacuums at some customer sites, the company refused Romero's repeated requests to return to work. Claiming "there would be too much risk to return [Romero] to work without a 100% release," ISNW placed Romero on unpaid leave,

then fired her on January 21, 2020.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits employers from refusing to provide reasonable accommodations to employees or applicants with a disability unless doing so would constitute an undue hardship. After first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement through its conciliation process, the EEOC filed its lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington (EEOC v. Innovative Services NW, Civil Number 2:23-CV-00295). The agency seeks back pay, compensatory and punitive damages, and injunctive relief designed to prevent such discrimination in the future.

“Ms. Romero simply asked to return to work using an upright vacuum, equipment already used by other employees. Instead, ISNW chose to fire her,” said Elizabeth Cannon, director of EEOC’s Seattle Field Office. “Under the ADA, an employer cannot deny an employee with a disability the opportunity to work when there is a readily available accommodation that would allow her to perform her job.”

EEOC Trial Attorney Annabel Pollioni said, “Congress passed the ADA to remove barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from finding and keeping their jobs. Ms. Romero was a loyal and motivated worker who needed a basic accommodation in order to return to work.”

The EEOC’s Seattle Field Office has jurisdiction over Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

For more information on disability discrimination, please visit

<https://www.eeoc.gov/disability-discrimination> (<https://www.eeoc.gov/disability-discrimination>).

The EEOC advances opportunity in the workplace by enforcing federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination. More information is available at **www.eeoc.gov (<http://www.eeoc.gov>)**. Stay connected with the latest EEOC news by subscribing to our **[email updates](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USEEOC/subscriber/new) (<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USEEOC/subscriber/new>)**.