



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Press Release

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Papa John's Pizza to Pay \$175,000 to Settle Disability Discrimination Lawsuit

Settles Federal Agency Charges Pizza Chain Failed to Accommodate and Fired Blind Employee Because of Disability

ATLANTA – Papa John's Pizza, an international chain of pizza restaurants based in Louisville, Kentucky, will pay \$175,000 and provide other relief to settle a disability discrimination lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the federal agency announced today.

According to the EEOC's suit, in early 2020, Michael Barnes applied for a job at his local Papa John's restaurant in Athens, Georgia, after hearing from a friend that the company hired individuals with vision impairments. Barnes, who is legally blind and relies on his service dog for his commute, reached out to the local store manager and applied for a job. Barnes was hired but could not start until his accommodation request to bring his service dog was formally granted by Papa John's. Papa John's denied Barnes's accommodation request and fired him before he worked a single shift.

Such conduct violates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The EEOC filed suit (Civil Action No. 3:23-CV-00030-TES) in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia, Athens Division, after first attempting to reach a pre-

litigation settlement via its conciliation process.

Under the two-year consent decree resolving the lawsuit, Papa John's will pay \$175,000 in monetary damages to Barnes; train its employees on the ADA; review its employment policies; and allow the EEOC to monitor complaints of discrimination or retaliation.

“Not allowing blind and visually impaired people to travel to and from work in the way that affords them confidence and independence is akin to telling sighted workers who rely on the flexibility and independence of driving that they may not travel to work by car,” said Karla Gilbride, the EEOC’s general counsel. “We are glad that Papa John’s has agreed to provide training to its employees and hope that in the future, no other job applicant who uses a service dog will experience the discrimination that Mr. Barnes faced.”

Marcus G. Keegan, regional attorney for the EEOC’s Atlanta District Office, said, “The ADA protects workers with disabilities by requiring employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities to afford them an equal opportunity to work. The EEOC is pleased that Mr. Barnes has been compensated and the company agreed to implement training and evaluate its policies to prevent this type of discrimination from occurring again.”

Darrell Graham, district director of the EEOC’s Atlanta office, added, “The Commission is steadfast in its commitment to making sure all employees have an equal opportunity to earn and enjoy the privileges and benefits of employment, regardless of their disability status.”

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>**).