



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Press Release

09-19-2023

EEOC Sues Hank's Furniture for Religious Discrimination

Florida Furniture Store Fired an Assistant Manager for Refusing to Violate Her Sincerely Held Religious Beliefs, Federal Agency Charges

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – Arkansas-based Hank's Furniture, Inc., a retail seller of home furniture with stores in four states, violated federal law by refusing to accommodate the sincerely held religious beliefs of an assistant store manager in Pensacola, Florida and then firing her, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit filed today.

According to the EEOC's suit, in 2021, Hank's Furniture implemented a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy. When the Pensacola assistant store manager requested an accommodation exempting her from the requirement due to her Christian beliefs, her store manager and immediate supervisor informed her that the company would strip her of her management position if she refused to comply with the policy, no matter the reason. Despite her verbal and written requests for a religious accommodation, which Hank's Furniture could have honored without undue hardship, the EEOC says, the company denied her requests and terminated her employment.

This alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits an employer from failing to accommodate an employee's sincerely held religious beliefs absent undue hardship. The EEOC filed suit (EEOC v. Hank's Furniture, Inc.,

Case No. 3:23-cv-24533 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida, Pensacola Division after its Mobile Local Office completed an investigation and first attempted to reach a pre-litigation settlement through its voluntary conciliation process. The EEOC seeks monetary damages for the terminated employee, including back pay, compensatory and punitive damages, and injunctive relief to prevent such unlawful conduct in the future.

“Federal law requires employers to accommodate sincerely held religious beliefs if reasonable accommodation can be made without causing undue burden to the business,” said EEOC Birmingham District Director Bradley Anderson.

Marsha Rucker, regional attorney for the EEOC’s Birmingham District, said, “This suit should remind employers they must communicate with employees requesting accommodation for religious beliefs and try to accommodate those beliefs whenever reasonably possible. The Supreme Court’s recent ruling in *Groff v. DeJoy* is illustrative of this point.”

For more information on religious accommodation, please visit

<https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/what-you-should-know-workplace-religious-accommodation> (**<https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/what-you-should-know-workplace-religious-accommodation>**).

The EEOC’s Birmingham District consists of Alabama, Mississippi (except 17 northern counties) and the Florida Panhandle.

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>**).