



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Press Release

05-09-2023

EEOC Sues Charlotte IHOP for Religious Discrimination and Retaliation

Restaurant Refused to Honor Accommodation and Fired Employee Because of His Religion, Federal Agency Charges

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Suncakes, LLC, a Texas-based company doing business as IHOP, violated federal law when it required an employee to work on Sundays despite a previously granted religious accommodation, and then fired him when he attempted to exercise his federally protected rights, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit filed today.

According to the EEOC’s lawsuit, Suncakes hired a cook at its Woodlawn Road location in Charlotte in January 2021. At the time of hire, the employee requested and was granted a religious accommodation of not working on Sundays to honor his religious observances. After a change in management in April 2021, the new general manager expressed hostility toward the accommodation and required the employee to work on Sunday, April 25 and Sunday, May 9. After the May 9 shift, the employee told the general manager he would not be working the following Sunday. The general manager refused to allow the employee to work his next scheduled shift and fired him. The manager then made comments to other employees such as, “religion should not take precedence over [the employee’s] job” and that the employee “thinks it is more important to go to church than to pay his bills.”

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which provides for religious accommodations in the workplace and protects individuals from religious discrimination and retaliation. The EEOC filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of North Carolina, (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Suncakes, LLC, d/b/a IHOP Civil Action No.: 3:23-cv-00274) after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement through its voluntary conciliation process. The EEOC seeks monetary relief, including back pay, and compensatory and punitive damages. The EEOC also seeks injunctive relief against the restaurant to end any ongoing religious discrimination and to prevent such conduct in the future.

“It is unlawful for an employer to take adverse action against an employee because the employee asserted his rights relating to a religious accommodation,” said Melinda C. Dugas, regional attorney for the EEOC's Charlotte District.

For more information on religious discrimination, please visit

<https://www.eeoc.gov/religious-discrimination> (<https://www.eeoc.gov/religious-discrimination>**)**. For more information on retaliation, please visit **<https://www.eeoc.gov/retaliation> (**<https://www.eeoc.gov/retaliation>**)**.

The EEOC's Charlotte District is charged with enforcing federal employment anti-discrimination laws in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

The EEOC advances opportunity in the workplace by enforcing federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination. More information is available at **www.eeoc.gov (**<https://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>**)**.