



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Press Release

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EEOC Sues Mercy Health St. Mary's for Religious Discrimination

Hospital Denied Applicant's Request for Religious Exemption From Flu Shot Requirement, Then Rescinded Job Offer, Federal Agency Alleges

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. —Mercy Health St. Mary's, a Grand Rapids hospital and member of the Trinity Health system, violated federal law when it failed to provide a religious accommodation to an applicant and declined to hire him because of his religious beliefs, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit filed today. Mercy Health has approximately 800 hospital beds in its five hospital campuses located in Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Lakeshore, Michigan.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, Mercy Health St. Mary's violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by rescinding a job offer to an applicant who, for religious reasons, refused to receive a flu vaccine. Under Mercy Health's influenza policy, employees are required to get a flu shot on an annual basis unless granted an exemption. While the applicant's conditional job offer was pending, he applied for an exemption to the flu shot requirement based on his religious beliefs. Mercy Health arbitrarily denied his request and rescinded the job offer, without specifying to the applicant why or how his request for an exemption was deficient, the EEOC said.

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. After attempting to reach a pre-litigation resolution through its conciliation process, the EEOC filed suit in U.S. District Court Western District of Michigan (EEOC v. Mercy Health St. Mary's, Case No. 1:23-cv-00435). The EEOC is seeking monetary relief for the applicant and an injunction prohibiting the hospital from engaging in this type of conduct in the future.

“Instead of rejecting the applicant’s religious accommodation request outright, Mercy Health should have followed up with him if it had questions,” said Dale Price, senior trial attorney in the EEOC’s Detroit Field Office. “If it had questions, Mercy Health could have spoken with this individual before making a decision to determine the contours of his religious beliefs, rather than prematurely determining that his beliefs were not genuine.”

The EEOC’s Detroit Field Office is part of the Indianapolis District Office, which oversees Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, and parts of Ohio.

For more information on religious discrimination, please visit

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

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