



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Press Release

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EEOC Sues Sunnybrook Union for Race Discrimination

Sunnybrook Education Association Blocked a Promotion and Raise for a Black School District Employee Because of His Race, Federal Agency Charges

CHICAGO, Ill. – Sunnybrook Education Association, IEA-NEA, (“Sunnybrook Union”), a labor union representing teachers and educational support personnel in the Sunnybrook School District, violated federal civil rights law by blocking the promotion of an African American custodian to the role of head custodian because of his race, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit filed today.

The EEOC said that Sunnybrook Union grieved the promotion of a Black employee of Sunnybrook School District 171 rather than ignoring the promotion or negotiating a memorandum of understanding, as it had done in other cases where non-Black employees received promotions or salaries that did not conform to the collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

Such conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits labor organizations from discriminating against members on the basis of race and causing or attempting to cause an employer to discriminate against an individual because of their race, sex, religion, or other protected class.

“Throughout our investigation, the Sunnybrook Union failed to provide a

reasonable explanation for why it grieved this employee's promotion while failing to grieve the salaries of other, non-Black employees, that did not conform to the requirements of the CBA," Julianne Bowman, the district director of the EEOC's office in Chicago, said.. "As a result of Sunnybrook Union's grievance, the employee is doing the work of a head custodian while being paid at a much lower rate than his colleagues."

The case (EEOC v. Sunnybrook Education Association, IEA-NEA, 1:23-cv-02804) was filed in the U.S. District Court of Illinois, Northern District, Eastern Division and assigned to Judge Joan B. Gottschall. The EEOC is seeking full relief, including back pay, compensatory damages, punitive damages, and a commitment from the union to permit the employee to receive his promotion and raise.

"The Sunnybrook Union should be opening doors for the employees it represents, not standing in the way of their advancement," said Gregory Gochanour, the EEOC's regional attorney in Chicago. "Here, we have an employee doing the job of a head custodian but prevented from receiving the benefits of that job because of his race."

The EEOC's Chicago District Office is responsible for processing charges of employment discrimination, administrative enforcement, and the conduct of agency litigation in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and North and South Dakota, with Area Offices in Milwaukee and Minneapolis.

For more information on race and color discrimination, please visit

[https://www.eeoc.gov/racecolor discrimination \(https://www.eeoc.gov/racecolor%20discrimination\)](https://www.eeoc.gov/racecolor%20discrimination).

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