



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Press Release

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EEOC Sues Papa John's Pizza for Disability Discrimination

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

ATLANTA – Papa John's Pizza, an international chain of pizza restaurants based in Louisville, Kentucky, unlawfully denied a blind employee's request to keep his service dog on site and away from both customers and food preparation activities during his shifts, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charges in a lawsuit filed 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 alleged conduct violates the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits discriminating on the basis of disability. The EEOC filed suit (Civil Action No. 3:23-CV-00030-TES) in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia, Athens Division, after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement

via its conciliation process. The EEOC is seeking back pay, reinstatement or front pay, compensatory damages, and punitive damages for Barnes, as well as injunctive relief to prevent future discrimination.

“The ADA prohibits employers from terminating employees because of a disability and denying them equal employment opportunities,” said Marcus G. Keegan, regional attorney for the EEOC’s Atlanta District Office. “The ADA protects employees seeking reasonable accommodations involving service animals. Employers must evaluate such requests on their individual merits. They may not, as Papa John’s has done, reject such requests based on vague and unspecified ‘health and safety’ concerns.”

“Congress passed Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act to remove the barriers to employment faced by workers with disabilities, and for Mr. Barnes, his service dog does just that,” said Darrell Graham, district director of the Atlanta office. “The EEOC will continue its fight to ensure that all employees, regardless of disability status, have an equal opportunity to earn the privileges and benefits of employment.”

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 about disability discrimination is available at **www.eeoc.gov/eeoc-disability-related-resources (<http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc-disability-related-resources>)**. 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>)**.