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Nordstrom to Pay \$292,500 to Settle EEOC Harassment Lawsuit

Hispanic, Black Employees Subjected to Racial and Ethnic Slurs, Agency Charged

National department store Nordstrom, Inc. will pay \$292,500 to 10 former employees and furnish other remedial measures to settle a harassment lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the agency announced today. EEOC had charged that the department store manager harassed Hispanic and black employees based on their national origin, race, and color, and retaliated against those who complained about the harassment.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, an alterations department manager complained that she "hate[d] Hispanics," and that Hispanics were "lazy" and "ignorant." Hispanic tailors were chastised by the alterations manager for speaking to each other in Spanish. The same manager made other derogatory remarks such as "I don't like blacks" and "you're black, you stink." The alterations manager harassed the alterations staff at Nordstrom stores in Palm Beach Gardens and Wellington, Fla.

The employees complained to Nordstrom about the harassment, but the harassment did not stop. The alteration's manager retaliated against those who complained by continuing the racially offensive comments, unfairly berating employees and citing them for alleged performance problems.

Acting Chairman of the EEOC, Stuart J. Ishimaru, stated, "It does not matter whether someone is employed on the sales floor or, as in this case, working behind the scenes, the EEOC will pursue instances of harassment in violation of federal employment discrimination laws."

Under the terms of a consent decree, Nordstrom will pay \$292,500 in damages. The decree also requires the company to distribute its policy addressing unlawful harassment to all employees in the Wellington and Palm Beach stores; provide harassment training, post a notice on the resolution of the lawsuit, and submit a semi-annual report to EEOC on all harassment complaints received during the next two years.

Minnesota Federal District Court Grants Final Approval of EEOC Religious Discrimination Suits

***Prayer Breaks Sought by Muslim Employees to be Instituted;
Total of \$365,000 to be Paid, Job Offers Made in Two Cases***

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) announced recently that Magistrate Judge Jeanne J. Graham of the U.S. District Court in St. Paul, Minn., has ordered final approval of consent decrees settling two religious discrimination lawsuits brought by the EEOC against a leading St. Cloud, Minn.-based chicken processor, Gold'n Plump Poultry, Inc., and an employment agency, The Work Connection.

Under the decree approved in the Gold'n Plump case, the employer will add a paid break during the second half of each shift which will accommodate the religious beliefs of Muslim employees who wish to pray in the course of the work day. The break is in addition to a break early in the shift and lunch breaks which are required by law. The timing of the added break will fluctuate during the year to coordinate with the religious timing for Muslim prayers. The new break times will apply to all who work in a designated portion of the plant, regardless of religious faith.

"Employers need to recognize the increasing diversity of religion in our country and provide accommodations as required by federal employment discrimination laws," stated EEOC Acting Chairman Stuart J. Ishimaru. "Systemic cases such as these make workplaces better for many individuals."

In addition to other related relief, Gold'n Plump will provide \$215,000 to a class of 128 Somali American Muslims who claimed religious discrimination, including discharge and discipline. An additional \$150,000 will be paid to 28 class members under the consent decree entered in EEOC v. The Work Connection. EEOC attorneys determined the amount each of the 156 individuals will receive. The amount ranges from \$200 to \$18,880 per person. Most class members will receive between \$500 and \$1,500. The recipients and amounts of the payment were approved by the court.

The EEOC had alleged in EEOC v. The Work Connection that, in order to be referred for work at Gold'n Plump's facilities in Cold Spring, Minn., and Arcadia, Wis., applicants were required to sign a form stating that they would not refuse to handle pork in the course of their jobs. In addition to stopping use of the "pork form," The Work Connection will provide each of the 28 class members, job seekers previously turned away for refusing to sign the "pork form," with an offer for placement at Gold'n Plump. The decrees in both cases prohibit retaliation by the employers and provide for training and reporting to the EEOC.