

9.4: Case Study: AEON Global Health to Pay \$56,000 to Settle EEOC Race and Sex Harassment and Retaliation Suit

Client Services Employee Subjected to Hostile Work Environment And Then Fired for Reporting It, Federal Agency Charged

ATLANTA – Peachstate Health Management, LLC, doing business as AEON Global Health, a Georgia-certified reference clinical laboratory in Gainesville, Georgia, will pay \$56,000 and provide other relief to settle a race- and sex-based harassment and retaliation lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, a female supervisor at AEON subjected one of its African American female client services employees to daily race- and sex-based verbal harassment. The employee reported the harassment to the company on a weekly basis for more than two months. The employee's reports of harassment culminated in a meeting with upper-level executives where the employee's reports of race- and sex-based harassment were raised. During this meeting, AEON subjected the employee to additional sex-based verbal harassment and then fired her, according to the EEOC's complaint.

This alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits race- and sex-based harassment in the workplace and prohibits employers from firing, demoting, harassing or otherwise retaliating against employees because of complaints of discrimination or harassment. The EEOC filed suit (Civil Action No. 2:21-cv-00092-RWS-JCF) in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, Gainesville Division, after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement via its conciliation process.

Under the consent decree resolving the lawsuit, AEON will pay \$56,000 in monetary damages to the employee. The company will also conduct regular reporting, monitoring, annual training, dissemination of anti-discrimination policies to employees and managers, and notice posting.

"Sex- and race-based harassment continues to be a problem in the workplace," said Marcus G. Keegan, regional attorney for the EEOC's Atlanta District Office. "Additionally, an employee's right to complain about discriminatory harassment is critical to addressing these problems. Employers must recognize the importance of responding appropriately and effectively to their employee's complaints. The EEOC is pleased that AEON agreed to implement training on its anti-discrimination policies to prevent discrimination from occurring there again."

Darrell Graham, district director of the Atlanta office, added, "No employee should have to endure sex- and race-based harassment in order to earn a living. The EEOC will take appropriate action to protect workers from such mistreatment if an employer fails to do so."

The EEOC advances opportunity in the workplace by enforcing federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination. More information is available at www.eeoc.gov.

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