The Tractor Supply Company Is Sued for HIV Discrimination

The Mississippi-based Tractor Supply Company disclosed an employee's HIV status and ultimately fired her, alleges the lawsuit.

November 8, 2022 By Trent Straube

Tractor Supply Company, a national rural retailer based in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, is facing a federal discrimination lawsuit for allegedly disclosing an employee's HIV status and ultimately firing her, according to a press release from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which filed the suit, EEOC v. Tractor Supply Company.

HIV is considered a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As the press release notes, this federal law prohibits:

- Disclosing an employee's confidential medical information;
- Discriminating against individuals with a disability;
- Subjecting an individual to a hostile work environment because of their disability;
- Retaliating against an employee who opposes unlawful conduct.

The EEOC's lawsuit alleges that the Tractor Supply Company store in Laurel, Mississippi, repeatedly demanded to know why an employee couldn't work a specific shift. Eventually the employee, who was born with HIV, explained that she had a medical appointment for that condition.

The company then disclosed this private information to coworkers and customers, according to the lawsuit. She was harassed because of this, and when she reported the situation, she was disciplined and then fired. Prior to this, she had been doing well at her job and had recently been promoted.

“An employee should be able to trust that their employer will protect the privacy of their confidential medical information,” said Bradley Anderson, the director of the EEOC Birmingham District office, in the press release. “They should also be able to work without worrying about whether they will be harassed because of their disability. That’s what the ADA requires, and the EEOC is committed to forcing these important protections under the law.”

“Tractor Supply Company created and maintained a hostile work environment for this employee by publicizing her private medical information and then failing to address the harassment this generated,” said Marsha Rucker, regional attorney for the EEOC Birmingham District office. “Rather than protect this employee from harassment, the company fired her. This is unlawful under the ADA, and the EEOC will hold any employer accountable when it violates this crucial federal law.”

The lawsuit notes that the rural retailer employs about 50,000 people across 49 states.

A POZ cover story on taking action against HIV discrimination

In related news, see our POZ cover story “Defying Discrimination,” about taking action against stigma and discrimination. It includes tips on filing an HIV lawsuit.

For more information on the ADA and HIV discrimination, visit ADA.gov/HIV. You can file an ADA complaint with the Department of Justice online and by mail. For more information about the ADA, visit ADA.gov, or call 800-514-0301 or 800-514-0383 (TDD). For disability discrimination, you can also visit https://www.eeoc.gov/disability-discrimination.

To read about similar HIV cases, click #Discrimination. You’ll find articles such as “Tattoo Studio to Pay $7,000 in Alleged HIV Discrimination Case,” “$3M HIV Discrimination Lawsuit Filed Against Morehouse College,” “Service Members With Undetectable HIV Can Remain Deployable” and “Lawyer Who Fought Abortion Rights Takes Aim at HIV Prevention PrEP.”

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