

Former Starbucks Employee Files Sexual Harassment and Disability Discrimination Case
Tuesday, May 07, 2013 04:33:36 PM (GMT)

11-year Starbucks employee was sexually harassed and ridiculed due to her disability, only to be fired without notice while she was on an approved disability leave, after she had complained about the hostile work environment.

NEW YORK, May 7, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- Kari Smith, a former shift supervisor at Starbucks, filed a discrimination case yesterday in the Eastern District of New York alleging that she was sexually harassed and subjected to a hostile work environment due to her disability, retaliated against when she complained and ultimately terminated while she was on an approved disability leave.

As the Complaint alleges, Ms. Smith was an eleven year Starbucks employee. Ms. Smith suffers from a medical condition known as Syncope, which causes uncontrollable and unpredictable fainting. Ms. Smith worked at a few Starbucks locations in Brooklyn, and at each location she was ridiculed and humiliated for her disability. After Ms. Smith complained about her treatment she was demoted and transferred to different stores.

As alleged in the Complaint, Ms. Smith's treatment was particularly egregious at the Starbucks located in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn. There, when Ms. Smith would suffer injuries from fainting episodes, male employees would "joke" about Ms. Smith's condition, making comments to her and customers, such as "You must like it rough!", "Next time she'll do what I say", "She's in Fight Club, but not very good at it" and "She needs to leave her boyfriend." When Ms. Smith required treatment, the store manager would tell her, "You're ruining everyone else's lives!" and "You're an inconvenience to everyone else in the store!"

The Complaint also alleges that Ms. Smith was sexually harassed at the Cobble Hill location. It was common-place for offensive comments to be made about female body parts. One employee would repeatedly ask Ms. Smith if she wanted to "make out" with him. Male employees at the Cobble Hill store would engage in what they considered a purported "game" of bending over and pinning women between their behind and the wall. This became known as getting "a** raped." Moreover, there was an isolated storage room in the basement of the Cobble Hill store which was dark and had no cameras and was openly referred to as the "rape room." Starbucks was well aware of the conduct at this store as Ms. Smith made complaints to her store manager and district manager.

Starbucks ultimately fired Ms. Smith while she was out on an approved leave for the stated reason that she did not provide the company with certain necessary disability paperwork. Despite being an 11 year employee, and being in constant communication with the company during her leave, Starbucks never inquired with Ms. Smith as to the supposedly necessary paperwork, nor provided her any opportunity to cure any supposed deficiencies, before callously firing her without notice.

Douglas H. Wigdor, a partner at Thompson Wigdor LLP stated, "Starbucks fired Ms. Smith when she was at her most vulnerable. While Starbucks likes to hold itself out as a progressive company, even their best marketing and public relations efforts cannot conceal the outrageous conduct Ms. Smith was subjected to."

Ms. Smith stated that, "I brought this suit to hold Starbucks accountable for the way I was treated and to make sure others do not have to work in the same painful environment."

The case is entitled *Kari Smith v. Starbucks Corporation*, Case No. 13 CV 2732, and was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Additional information about the case can be obtained from and all inquiries may be directed to Douglas H. Wigdor at the offices of Thompson Wigdor LLP in New York, New York at (212) 257-6800.

About Thompson Wigdor: Thompson Wigdor LLP (<http://www.thompsonwigdor.com>) is a law firm specializing in high-profile employment litigation. They can be reached at (212) 257-6800 or twinfo@thompsonwigdor.com

SOURCE Thompson Wigdor LLP

Contacts: Douglas H. Wigdor, Esq., Thompson Wigdor LLP, (212) 257-6800, dwigdor@thompsonwigdor.com

Countries: United States

Languages: English

Primary Identifiers: SBUX-US

Related Identifiers: SBUX-US

Subjects: Legal Issues