

Twitter janitors in New York file lawsuit over firings and demand backpay

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Former janitors at Twitter offices in New York City filed a lawsuit on Tuesday against the social media company over their abrupt termination in December 2022 after billionaire Elon Musk took over the company and cut approximately 80% of staff. The lawsuit alleges Twitter violated the Displaced Building Service Workers Protection Act by failing to retain the janitors after terminating the contract, hiring a new contractor, and not retaining the employees under the previous contract. New York City's Displaced Building Service Workers Protection Act requires new building owners, managers, contractors and commercial lessees to retain employees for a 90-day transition period and says they must be offered continued employment if their performance is considered satisfactory. Janitors at Twitter headquarters in San Francisco, who were also abruptly fired in December 2022, inspired the city of San Francisco to pass similar legislation in April 2023. The lawsuit alleges the workers are owed "hundreds of thousands of dollars in back wages" for violation of the law. The union representing the workers, SEIU 32BJ, sent a request to Twitter in December 2022 advising the company of its obligation to retain the employees for a minimum of 90 days. The lawsuit alleges Twitter never responded. "They've been out of work, their families are suffering, they're suffering, it's really a terrible situation and this is really the exact situation that law was designed to prevent," said Hugh Baran, an attorney at Kakalec Law PLLC which is representing the workers in the lawsuit. "Twitter has had a lot of time and a lot of notice about the violations and they still refuse to come into compliance in any way. Our clients are really taking a very brave step here to enforce the law." When Twitter retained a new contractor in February 2023, NeXgen Facilities Group, the union also notified the new contractor of its obligation to retain the employees from the previous contract for a minimum of 90 days, but it was also ignored. The janitors protested their terminations without warning in January 2023. They explained that the firings, right before the Christmas holidays, were a shocking blow, leaving them bereft of income and worried about being able to afford food, basic expenses and health insurance. Many of the workers had been working for Twitter since 2015 and had previously retained their jobs when the company switched contractors. "I was so happy working for Twitter. I was able to pay my bills, get babysitters for my kids. Now, it's a nightmare for me. I don't know how I'm going to do it or know what's going to happen," said Laureta, who did not want her last name used out of fear of future employment consequences, in an interview with the Guardian in January 2023. "There was no explanation. We worked Monday, the 19th, and that night we got the message. It was shocking right before Christmas. We didn't have a good holiday. No merry Christmas, no happy new year, we were thinking about our jobs and if we were going back." Twitter has faced numerous lawsuits in the wake of Elon Musk's takeover of the company, including by former employees, vendors and shareholders. Four Twitter vendors filed a class action lawsuit in California against Twitter in May 2023, alleging the company has failed to pay bills

ranging from \$40,000 to \$140,000 for services performed last year. An affiliate of the global investment firm KKR filed a lawsuit against Twitter in May 2023 over nearly \$1.3m in unpaid rent for Twitter office space in Oakland, California, with other office property owners having previously filed lawsuits over unpaid rent for Twitter office space since Musk's takeover. Twitter has also faced lawsuits from disabled workers alleging that policies to report in the office and log long hours at high intensity discriminate against disabled workers, and 2,000 former employees are pursuing claims against Twitter through individual arbitration. Attorneys representing former employees have claimed Twitter is dragging out the arbitration process. Elon Musk terminated Twitter's press team shortly after assuming ownership of the company and did not respond to requests for comment aside from an automated email responding with a poop emoji. NeXgen Facilities Group also did not respond to requests for comment.