

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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Contact: Lynn Bruner
District Director
(314) 539-7830
TTY: (314) 539- 7803

Robert G. Johnson
Regional Attorney
(314) 539-7910

Donna L. Harper
Supv. Trial Attorney
(314) 539-7914
Anne E. Gusewelle

Trial Attorney
(314) 539-7924

EEOC SEEKS TO JOIN NATIONWIDE SEX DISCRIMINATION SUIT AGAINST RENT-A-CENTER

ST. LOUIS - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) today filed a motion to intervene in a nationwide sex discrimination class action lawsuit against Rent-A-Center, Inc. The Commission claims that Rent-A-Center unlawfully fired women or forced them to quit, refused to hire women, and discriminated against females in the terms and conditions of their employment. The Commission also alleges that Rent-A-Center failed to keep proper employment records as required by federal law.

The EEOC, if permitted to intervene in the class action, will seek an injunction to prevent Rent-A-Center from discriminating against female job applicants and employees because of their sex. Additionally, the Commission will seek backpay, compensatory and punitive damages, and reinstatement or front pay for women who lost their jobs or were not hired because of discrimination. The Commission will also seek an order directing Rent-A-Center to preserve all legally required employment records.

Vindicating the rights of women who are affected by a nationwide corporate policy of sex discrimination "serves a compelling public interest," said EEOC Chairwoman Ida L. Castro. "Our involvement in this case will ensure that appropriate relief is provided to those affected by the discrimination."

In 1998, Renters Choice acquired approximately 1,400 Rent-A-Center stores and the company assumed the name of Rent-A-Center. According to a class action complaint filed in federal court in East St. Louis, Ill., by 19 female employees on August 30, 2000, the company then systematically fired female employees.

The class complaint alleges that Rent-A-Center eliminated job classifications previously held by women, imposed a weight-lifting requirement unrelated to actual job requirements, harassed and unfairly disciplined female employees, assigned women cleaning and clerical duties, demoted and failed to promote females, and discharged or forced women to resign. The complaint also alleges that the company discouraged women from applying and rejected them when they did apply.

Rent-A-Center, headquartered in Plano, Texas, now has about 2,100 rent-to-own stores and about 10,000 employees throughout the United States, including several stores in the St. Louis area in Missouri and Illinois.

Lynn Bruner, Director of the EEOC's St. Louis District Office, expressed strong support for the suit. "The Commission brings suits like the one against Rent-A-Center to send a clear message to corporations that sex discrimination in employment will not be allowed," said Ms. Bruner.

The EEOC enforces Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act; the Equal Pay Act; prohibitions against discrimination affecting individuals with disabilities in the federal sector; sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991; and Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector and state and local governments. Additional information about the Commission is available on the agency's web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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