

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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UPS SUED FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RASTAFARIAN

EEOC Charges United Parcel Service with Religious Bias due to 'No Beard' Policy

NEWARK, N.J. - Global shipping giant United Parcel Service (UPS) committed religious discrimination at its Secaucus, N.J., facilities, by refusing to hire a Rastafarian as a driver helper because of his beard, which he wore for religious purposes, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charges in a lawsuit.

EEOC says that UPS required Ronnis Mason to shave his beard if he were to be hired for that position helping with customer deliveries and requiring customer contact. Mason wears his beard as part of his observance of Rastafarianism, a Jamaican-born religion with around one million adherents in the world. Mason explained to UPS that he could not shave his beard, and UPS told him that he could then only apply for an "inside," lower paying position that would not have contact with the public.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires employers to make reasonable accommodations to employees' and applicants' sincerely held religious beliefs as long as this does not pose an undue hardship. The EEOC alleges that by refusing to accommodate Mason's religion and by not permitting him to work as a driver helper, UPS interfered with Mason's employment opportunities and ability to make a better living in the higher-paid position he sought. The EEOC filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey in Newark after first attempting to reach a voluntary settlement.

"Employers are not permitted to deny an individual equal opportunities because of that person's religion, and the EEOC will seek full relief against employers who discriminate," said Elizabeth Grossman, the EEOC's New York District regional attorney.

Spencer H. Lewis, Jr, director for the EEOC's New York District Office, added, "Employees are entitled to an accommodation of their sincerely held religious beliefs and practices they should not be hidden from the public in the back room or paid inferior wages simply because they are practicing their religion."

According to its web site, Atlanta-based UPS had \$42.6 billion in revenues in 2005 and has 407,200 employees worldwide (348,400 in the United States).

The EEOC is responsible for enforcing the nation's laws prohibiting discrimination in employment based on race, color, sex (including sexual harassment and pregnancy), religion, national origin, age, disability, and retaliation. Further information about the Commission is available on its web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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