

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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CONTACT: Robert D. Rose, Senior Trial Attorney
(212) 336-3708
Elizabeth Grossman, Regional Attorney
(212) 336-3696
TTY: (212) 336-3622

NINE WEST, JONES APPAREL GROUP TO PAY \$600,000 TO SETTLE NATIONAL ORIGIN AND SEX BIAS SUIT

EEOC Said Hispanic Women were Sexually Harassed and Racially Insulted

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. - Nine West and Jones Apparel Group will pay \$600,000 to victims of sexual harassment, national origin harassment and retaliation, and take substantial steps to prevent future workplace bias as part of a major litigation settlement announced today by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

EEOC's lawsuit (Civil Action No. CV-04-7514), in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, alleged that two high-level managers at Nine West's headquarters in White Plains, New York, subjected female employees to sexually harassing conduct, including solicitation for sex, unwelcome sexual advances, sexually explicit jokes and comments, and groping of women's bodies. Further, the EEOC charged, managers taunted the women with insulting remarks about their Hispanic origin.

Despite the women's repeated opposition to the behavior, the EEOC said, Nine West made no efforts to prevent or eradicate the continuing behavior. Instead, the EEOC alleged, Nine West allowed conditions to become so intolerable that some women were forced to quit their jobs.

Such conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual harassment or pregnancy) or national origin and protects employees who complain about such offenses from retaliation. The EEOC filed suit after the agency first attempted to reach a voluntary settlement.

White Plains-based Nine West is a major retailer of women's shoes and other apparel. The Jones Apparel Group, headquartered in Bristol, Pennsylvania, owns and operates numerous retail stores in the footwear and apparel industry, including Nine West.

The consent decree resolving the case, besides the monetary damages to the harassment victims, also prohibits the companies from engaging in further sexual harassment and requires them to amend and reissue their non-discrimination policy; train employees and managers in equal employment law; and provide periodic reports to the EEOC concerning any new discrimination complaints.

"The discriminatory practices at Nine West and Jones Apparel had a severe impact on the affected employees," said EEOC Senior Trial Attorney Robert D. Rose. "This resolution will fairly compensate the victims of that discrimination and put protective measures in place to prevent further discrimination."

Spencer H. Lewis, the EEOC's New York District Director, added, "This settlement is a reminder that bias against women and persons of color continues to permeate our society. The EEOC will continue to act to eradicate such bias from the workplace and allow all individuals the freedom to compete on a level playing field."

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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