

EEOC NEWS

U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION



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WILLIAMSBURG HOMETOWN IGA SUED BY EEOC FOR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

*Federal Agency Charges that the Grocery Refused to Hire Worker
Because of his Religious Beliefs*

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – The Williamsburg Hometown IGA violated federal discrimination law by refusing to hire a job applicant because of his Spiritualist Rastafarian dreadlocks hairstyle, the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit it filed on December 27, 2022.

The EEOC’s lawsuit (Case No. 6:22-cv-00235 in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky, London Division) alleges that Houchens Food Group, Inc. doing business as Hometown IGA, refused to hire Matthew Barnett because of his hairstyle. Barnett applied for a Hometown IGA Assistant Manager position, but when interviewed by Hometown IGA management staff, he was informed that he would need to cut his dreadlocks to work at the grocery. Barnett replied that his dreadlocks are worn for his religious beliefs and he would not cut them. The interview immediately concluded, and Hometown IGA refused to hire him.

Religious discrimination violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which requires employers to attempt to make a reasonable accommodation to sincere religious beliefs and practices. The EEOC filed suit after exhausting its conciliation efforts to reach a voluntary pre-litigation settlement.

“No employee or applicant should have to choose between their religion and their job,” said EEOC Indianapolis District Director Michelle Eisele.

EEOC Regional Attorney Ken Bird added, “Employers must consider reasonable accommodations, as necessary, which allow employees and applicants to hold jobs without sacrificing their religious beliefs.”

For more information on disability discrimination, please visit <https://www.eeoc.gov/disability-discrimination>. For more information on personal grooming as it relates to religious protections in the workplace, please visit <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/religious-garb-and-grooming-workplace-rights-and-responsibilities>.

The case is being litigated by the Louisville Area Office, which is part of the EEOC's Indianapolis District, with jurisdiction over Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and parts of Ohio.

The EEOC advances opportunity in the workplace by enforcing federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination. More information is available at www.eeoc.gov. Stay connected with the latest EEOC news by subscribing to our [email updates](#).