PRESS RELEASE
8-25-17

Private Prison GEO Group to Pay $60,000 To Settle EEOC Sexual Harassment And Retaliation Lawsuit

Female Correctional Officer Sexually Harassed and Retaliated Against, Federal Agency Charged

PHOENIX, Ariz. - The GEO Group, Inc., operator of the Central Arizona Correctional Facility (CACF) in Florence, Ariz., will pay $60,000 and furnish other relief to settle a sexual harassment and retaliation lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the agency announced today.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, GEO allowed its employees and managers to sexually harass Roberta Jones since June 2007. For example, the agency alleged that certain male superior officers and coworkers would frequently stand around bragging about their sexual exploits. At least two superior officers were alleged to have put their hands on Jones in an unwanted manner. GEO failed to adequately respond to Jones's complaints of sexual harassment, the EEOC said. The lawsuit also alleged that Geo assigned Ms. Jones to less desirable posts, disciplined, and terminated her after she complained about the harassment and participated in protected activity under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII, which prohibits sexual harassment, as well as barring employers from taking adverse action against employees because of their sex and because of their participation in activity protected by Title VII. The EEOC filed suit in U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona (EEOC v. The GEO Group, Inc., Civil Action No. 2:15-cv-01909-SPL) after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement through its conciliation process.

Under the consent decree settling the suit, GEO is required to pay $60,000 to Jones; review its equal employment opportunity policies; refer all complaints of sexual harassment to its Office of Professional Responsibility for investigation; ensure that any employment decisions that affect individuals involved in a complaint of sexual harassment are not based on any retaliatory motive; conduct training for all its superior officers and management staff at CACF; training on investigative techniques for all individuals who may investigate complaints of sexual harassment at CACF; make a number of employees ineligible for rehire; and ensure that its management evaluation system will take into account compliance with EEO policies, laws against retaliation, and compliance with the consent decree.

"Women have every right to work in an environment free of sexual harassment and sexual advances," said EEOC Phoenix Regional Attorney Mary Jo O'Neill. "Sexual harassment is degrading and inexcusable. In its June 2016 Workplace Report by Acting Chair Lipnic and Commissioner Feldblum, the Select Task Force on the Study of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace identified several studies that demonstrated that sexually harassed women then experience depression, general stress and anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and overall impaired psychological well-being. No employer has the right to cause or encourage such damage to its people."

EEOC Phoenix District Director Elizabeth Cadle added, "Retaliation is pernicious as well as unlawful. Over 45% of all charges the EEOC receives allege retaliation. It discourages workers from asserting their rights, and it encourages harassers to continue their mistreatment of other employees. Employees must feel free to report sexual harassment or other discriminatory acts without negative consequences."

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.