

AUTOZONE SETTLES RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION SUIT WITH \$75,000



Fortune 500 company and well-known chain AutoZone, Inc. will be paying 75,000 dollars to settle a religious discrimination lawsuit. The retailer and supplier of automobile parts was charged with violating federal law by subjecting one of its employee to harassment and failing to accommodate his religious beliefs. According to the lawsuit, which was filed by the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) on behalf of the former employee, the man was harassed by AutoZone managers at one of the company's stores in Everett, MA. He had converted to the Sikh religion, and the managers made inappropriate remarks such as asking if he had joined al-Qaeda and if he was a terrorist. There was likewise no interception when customers made similar terrorist jokes and referred to the man as bin Laden. The man's religion required that he wear a turban and a "kara" – a religious bracelet – but managers allegedly refused to allow the man to do so. The EEOC further asserted that the employee was terminated due to his religion, and AutoZone retaliated against him for requesting accommodation and complaining of discrimination that he had endured. The lawsuit was filed back in September 2010 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Massachusetts in Boston. It specifically cited religious harassment, religious discrimination and retaliation, all of which are violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. A settlement, in an effort to subvert litigation, was not successful. In January of this year, a judge ruled in favor of the EEOC on the charge of failure to accommodate the man's religious need to wear a turban. In lieu of taking the additional charges to trial, AutoZone agreed to a consent decree. In correlation with the EEOC's involvement, the man was represented by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights



Under Law of the Boston Bar Association and the Sikh Coalition. Along with the 75,000-dollar payment, the company will be required to adopt and distribute a new policy preventing religious discrimination; train its managers and employees in human resources on religious discrimination and the company's new policy; report to the EEOC the handling of any requests for religious accommodation, as well as complaints of religious harassment; and post a notice regarding the agreement, available to AutoZone's 65,000 employees in over 4,500 stores in the U.S. "It is plainly unlawful, as well as cruel and counter-productive, to harass employees or co-workers because of their religion," said Elizabeth Grossman, regional attorney for the EEOC's New York District Office, which has jurisdiction over Massachusetts. "Employers must be vigilant in watching out for such misconduct and resolute in stopping it if they find it." Senior trial attorney for the EEOC Markus L. Penzel expressed content with the decree agreed upon by all parties. He believed that AutoZone had taken "the steps necessary to reform its handling of religious accommodation issues and to ensure that what happened... will not happen to any other employees."