

## 12 EMPLOYMENT LAWSUITS AGAINST BETHUNE-COOKMAN UNIVERSITY



Bethune-Cookman University has been dealing with plenty of problems in the past couple of months including a sex scandal among professors, a rape investigation, and a near riot on its campus. Aside from all of this trouble, the most surprising thing to come out is the number of lawsuits that have been filed against the university by those who claim they have been fired no reason at all. There are 12 lawsuits facing the university, based in Daytona Beach, that claim employees were wrongly fired. That number of lawsuits is the most of any local college and three times more than any other private employer in the county of Volusia. Altogether, the 12 lawsuits are seeking hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages for ex-employees, and the group former men's basketball coach Clifford Reed and former football coach Alvin Wyatt. The president of the university, Trudie Kibbe Reed says do not point fingers at the university despite the large number of the employment lawsuits. "I think the economy is driving a lot of it," Reed said of the lawsuits. "They are up everywhere. Everybody is filing a lawsuit or grievance." The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission says that claims are up by 16 percent, with a record 99,922 charges filed in 2010. The biggest increase in numbers was when employees filed claims after they were fired that they were discriminated against. Those claims filed include 36,258 cases in 2010. Jason Bent, a law professor at Stetson University College of Law, sees a connection: "I think the conventional wisdom is that employment lawsuits rise when layoffs rise." On the other hand, the attorney representing fired basketball coach Clifford Reed, Diego Handel does not think that the poor economy has anything to do with the amount of employment lawsuits filed against the university. "This is an awful lot of litigation within one school," Handel said. "This has really roiled the community because so many people have been let go. And people who have been there a long time." Many lawyers point fingers towards a domino effect, where one employee gets fired and files a lawsuit, which causes other employees to do the same thing after they hear about the lawsuits in the news. "It may make some sense, intuitively, that someone who is sued is more likely to be sued again," Bent, the Stetson law professor, said. "They are about overtime not being paid, or not being paid for time you're actually working. Those lawsuits have sort of caught on. I wouldn't be able to draw any conclusions just based on the numbers." The attorneys representing fired football coach Wyatt are Kelly Chanfrau and Peter Heebner. Kelly had the following to say about the case: "In general, in any company or organization, if there are several staffing changes, the likelihood of lawsuits will rise," she said. "Especially if others have sued, that can create a domino effect."

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