

14 EMPLOYEES AT LAW FIRM FIRED FOR WEARING ORANGE SHIRTS



There are numerous reasons a person can be fired. Sleeping on the job, belligerent conduct, insubordination. But what about someone losing a job for wearing an orange shirt to work? That's what happened to 14 employees at a Florida law firm. According to several former employees of the Law Offices of Elizabeth R. Wellborn in Deerfield Beach, FL, some of the workers had been wearing orange shirts on Fridays for the last few months. They were hoping for a little uniformity when they joined one another for happy hour. Last Friday, on March 16th, 14 members of the orange-shirted crowd were called to a conference room. An executive said that he was aware of a protest linked to orange and that, as the employees were all donning orange, they were terminated. The executive, who asked if anyone was wearing orange for another reason, was told by at least one worker that there was no participation in a protest and that the purpose was the happy-hour gathering. The higher ups deliberated separately, but the ruling was not changed. All 14 employees were fired. Former litigation paralegal Lou Erik Ambert told the Sun Sentinel that the firm had "no office policy against wearing orange shirts." Ambert further stated that the workers were not warned prior to their termination and received no severance package of any type. He added that he felt "violated." The employees who lost their jobs included a single mother with four children. Another worker, Janice Doble, who supervised 12 people who handled documents for the firm, also has four children, all of whom are employed at the law firm. She expressed concern for her children's positions at the



company. "I don't want [executives] to retaliate and fire my kids," she said. A former employer who worked in the mailroom stated that he had no knowledge of any member of the happy-hour troupe associated with a protest. "To my mind, protesting is where you put your foot down, and you're not working. There was none of that today," he said. Florida is one of 37 U.S. states that recognize at-will employment. This is a legal doctrine which allows for employment to be ended without fear of liability provided that there is no contract or union. This means that an employer can fire a worker for any reason or for no reason at all, so long as the reason for termination is not unlawful. Ironically, had the employees been wearing orange to protest, as was initially suggested by the executive, they may have been protected by law. The National Labor Relations Act was designed "to encourage collective bargaining." As such, protests among employees are often protected by law, particularly when it's to protest what workers believe is unfair treatment from their bosses. So if wearing orange shirts signified a protest against management, the employees could have argued that it was a protected concerted activity. A spokesperson for the law firm offered no comment regarding the terminations.