

OWNER OF MCDONALD'S RESTAURANT RESOLVES HARASSMENT SUIT WITH \$1,000,000



A company that owns and operates 25 McDonald's restaurants will be paying \$1,000,000 to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit regarding one of its establishments in Wisconsin. Significant injunctive relief will likewise be provided, as part of a class action suit filed by the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). At the McDonald's in Reedsburg, WI, owned by Missoula Mac, Inc., male employees were allegedly creating a hostile work environment by sexual harassing their female co-workers, including teenagers. The EEOC complaint stated that for several years male employees had subjected females to sexually-infused comments, kissing, unwanted touching of private areas and forcing their hands onto the men's private parts. According to the EEOC, Missoula Mac failed to take proper action to rectify the situation, forcing at least one employee to quit and firing other employees who repeatedly complained of the co-workers' inappropriate conduct. Three of the women formerly employed at the restaurant filed discrimination charges with the EEOC, resulting in the lawsuit. The alleged sexual harassment and retaliation for complaining of harassment are both violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The EEOC initially tried to settle the matter out of court but ultimately filed its suit in April of last year. A four-year consent decree was signed to resolve the lawsuit. In addition to paying \$1,000,000 to ten former employees who were adversely affected, the company will create an ombudsperson position – an intermediary between the business and the EEOC – to monitor and resolve complaints of sexual harassment and retaliation; establish telephone and email hotlines for employees to report such behavior; evaluate managers and supervisors based in part on their restaurant's compliance with corresponding policies; track and maintain records of harassment and retaliation complaints; launch a training program for identifying and properly investigating internal complaints; post notices at all the company's restaurants regarding the settlement and its terms; and provide reports to the EEOC showing that it's complying



with the agreement.

“This is a sad case, demonstrating again that sexual harassment is still a challenge for women at some of our most successful, best known brands,” said John P. Rowe, district director of the EEOC's Chicago District Office, which investigated the initial EEOC complaint. The Chicago office is responsible for handling discrimination charges, administering enforcement and agency litigation in Wisconsin, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa, with Area Offices in Milwaukee and Minneapolis. John Hendrickson, the EEOC regional attorney in Chicago, noted that the harassment that allegedly took place in Reedsburg and the company's lack of response “devolved into a culture of oppression, retaliation and fear.” “Sexual harassment in the restaurant industry remains a problem nationwide,” said EEOC General Counsel P. David López. He further warned restaurants of accepting harassment as “part of the culture” in the industry. López added, “Many younger workers' first experience with the workplace is in [the restaurant] industry and it is important that harassment of these workers not be tolerated.”