

Jewish Holidays Lead to \$1.1M Award for Terminated Staff Attorney



A former staff attorney and magistrate in Ohio has won a significant victory in a lawsuit alleging First Amendment violations. Kimberly Edelstein was awarded more than \$1.1 million in a case against Judge Greg S. Stephens, who she claimed fired her for seeking time off for the Jewish High Holidays. The verdict, reached by federal jurors in Cincinnati, concluded that Edelstein's First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion had been violated.

According to Edelstein, Judge Stephens fired her the day after she requested eight non-consecutive days off in October 2016 for the Jewish holidays. Edelstein claimed that when she made the request, Judge Stephens shouted, "Holy cow, eight days!" An opinion in the case from August 2019 supports her account. In contrast, Judge Stephens argued that the termination was due to tensions between Edelstein and other staff members. Edelstein countered that the judge fabricated the problems.

The jury's award includes \$835,000 in back pay, \$250,000 in compensatory damages, and \$35,000 in punitive damages. Linda L. Woeber, a lawyer for Judge Stephens, expressed disappointment with the verdict and stated that they are considering their options. Woeber also emphasized that there was no evidence of religious bias and pointed out that the person who replaced Edelstein was Jewish.

The verdict in this case highlights the importance of protecting employees' rights to the free exercise of religion in the workplace. Employers are expected to accommodate employees' religious beliefs and practices as long as doing so does not impose an undue hardship on the business.

It is crucial for employees to understand their rights and for employers to be aware of their obligations under the law. This case serves as a reminder that religious discrimination can take many forms and is unacceptable in any form. Employers must ensure that their policies and practices align with the law and that employees are treated fairly and equitably, regardless of their religious beliefs.

The case of Kimberly Edelstein is a significant victory for those seeking to protect their religious rights in the workplace. The jury's award serves as a reminder that employers must accommodate employees' religious beliefs and practices and that religious discrimination is illegal and unacceptable.

REFERENCES:

Fired staff attorney awarded over \$1.1M for firing after she sought time off for Jewish holidays