

## California Agency Denies Tesla Access to Race Bias Probe Details



The California state Civil Rights Department has requested that a judge narrow the scope of his tentative ruling requiring the agency to provide more details about a probe it conducted before suing Tesla over allegations of widespread race bias at its flagship assembly plant. Lawyers from the department urged Judge Evelio Grillo during a court hearing in Oakland to limit the ruling, which he issued on Monday, requesting more information. Grillo said he would issue a final ruling in the next few days.

California law requires the civil rights department to investigate discrimination complaints by workers before suing employers. If the agency did not adequately probe specific claims against Tesla before suing, the electric carmaker could seek to remove them from the case.

The agency claims that Tesla's Fremont, California, plant is a racially segregated workplace where Black employees have been harassed and discriminated against in job assignments, discipline, and pay. Tesla has denied the allegations and said the lawsuit was politically motivated.

Sirithon Thanasombat, a lawyer for the department, told Grillo on Tuesday that courts only have the power to determine whether an investigation took place and not to inquire into the details or sufficiency of an investigation.

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Tesla's lawyer, Thomas Hill, countered that some detail is required to make that determination. Hill argued that the defense's case was that no investigation was conducted. Grillo said he was concerned that not requiring the department to provide details could violate Tesla's constitutional right to due process since the company is entitled to argue that the agency failed to investigate the claims before suing.

The judge also said there should be some limit to the information the department must provide. "You don't get to inquire into the most minute details," Grillo said. "But there's a big gap between that and 'trust us.'"

Several other lawsuits are pending in California courts that accuse Tesla of tolerating discrimination and sexual harassment at its factories. Tesla has denied wrongdoing.

A federal judge in Oakland in April 2022 cut a jury award to a Black worker who alleged racial harassment from \$137 million to \$15 million. The worker rejected the reduced award and opted for a new trial on damages, scheduled to begin on March 27.

The case against Tesla comes as the company is embroiled in several legal battles, including a lawsuit by the National Labor Relations Board alleging the company illegally fired workers advocating for a union. The case has been delayed due to the pandemic but is expected to proceed soon.

The lawsuit's outcome could have significant implications for Tesla and other companies accused of discrimination. If the judge ruled that the civil rights department did not adequately investigate the claims against Tesla, it could weaken the agency's ability to bring similar cases in the future. On the other hand, if the judge rules in favor of the department, it could set a precedent for holding companies accountable for discrimination in the workplace.