

EEOC settles bias suit involving Jehovah's Witness, dress code

Alliance Rental Centers recently agreed to pay \$21,500 to settle an EEOC religious discrimination suit brought by a former employee whose religious beliefs kept him from complying with the company's dress code.

According to the suit, the conflict emerged when Tyler Templeton, who worked in the company's Bridgeport Aaron's Rents store, refused to participate in the "Red Shirt Friday" program in which employees wore special shirts to show support for the U.S. military. Templeton, who worked as a product technician, claimed his Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs prevented him from expressing opinions about government matters.

The EEOC argued that, although Templeton told his supervisors about his neutrality regarding war, the company still reprimanded and later fired him for not complying with the dress code. According to Alliance, however, Templeton had worn the shirt on other occasions.

As part of the settlement, Alliance also agreed to update its employee handbook to include new policies and procedures for accommodating employees' religious beliefs.

Final note: The EEOC has become very active in pushing religious discrimination cases. That means you need to be proactive about religious accommodation. Review your religious discrimination policies to make sure they comply with the law.

Online resource: The EEOC provides extensive religious accommodation guidance on its web site at www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/religion.cfm.