



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

PRESS RELEASE

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National Denture Provider to Pay \$150,000 to Settle EEOC Sex and Race Harassment Suit

Federal Agency Charged Affiliated Dentist Harassed Female Assistants

BOSTON – Affordable Care, Inc., a national denture provider, will pay \$150,000 and furnish other relief to settle a sex and race discrimination lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the agency announced today. The lawsuit, filed in March 2009 in federal court in Springfield, Mass., charged that Affordable Care violated federal law when its affiliated dentist, Nelson Wood, sexually and racially harassed two female employees.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, Kinston, N.C.-based Affordable Care and Nelson Wood, operating as Nelson Wood, DMD, PC, created a sexually and racially hostile work environment for Ariede Mills, who is African American, and Laura Carl, who is white, at its office in West Springfield. The lawsuit alleged that, among other things, Wood referred to women as "whining b-----s," propositioned Mills for sex, spanked Carl repeatedly on the buttocks, made insulting remarks about blacks, and claimed that he had a relative who was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Both Mills and Carl complained repeatedly about Wood to Affordable Care, which is headquartered in North Carolina, but the company failed to stop the harassment. The EEOC also charged that Mills was fired in retaliation for her complaints, and that Carl was forced to quit because of the offensive conduct.

The settlement provides \$75,000 each to Mills and Carl. In addition to the monetary payments, the consent decree resolving the litigation (Civil Action No. 1:09-cv-10399), approved by Judge Michael Ponsor today, enjoins Affordable Care and Wood from further discriminating on the basis of sex and race; creates an independent EEO coordinator to receive and investigate complaints of discrimination and retaliation at Affordable Care's dental practices; mandates training on the requirements of anti-discrimination laws; and requires the issuance of a new anti-discrimination policy and the posting of a notice regarding the settlement.

Spencer H. Lewis, Jr., director of the EEOC's New York District Office, which has jurisdiction over Massachusetts, said, "This case is a reminder that the EEOC will not allow a company like Affordable Care to escape liability for the actions of its affiliated entities when it maintains control over those operations."

EEOC Senior Trial Attorney Markus L. Penzel in Boston added, "The EEOC is pleased that Affordable Care worked cooperatively with us to resolve this case with minimal litigation. We believe that the relief provided in the consent decree will help prevent what happened to Ms. Mills and Ms. Carl from happening to others in the future."