

EEOC wins jury verdict in age discrimination lawsuit involving former casket company employee

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) recently won a jury verdict in a five-year-old age discrimination lawsuit. The EEOC alleged that Fred W. Kuehnl was fired due to age discrimination by Howard Ayres, CEO of Warfield-Rohr Casket Company. Kuehnl, who is 56-years-old, upholstered the interior of caskets and served as foreman of the trimming division for 29 years.

“Although it took over five years, it feels good when you know that you were right,” said Kuehnl.

The Lawsuit

The EEOC asserted in the suit that prior to terminating Kuehnl, Ayres made numerous inflammatory age-based remarks and indicated that a younger employee could better serve the company. He was forced to train his 33-year-old replacement prior to his termination.

Kuehnl testified that when he told Ayres that he planned to work until age 65, the CEO remarked, “We will see about that.”

What the EEOC Said

Gerald S. Kiel, Regional Attorney for the EEOC’s Baltimore District Office, said, “Mr. Kuehnl was a dedicated and loyal employee who worked diligently for 29 years at Warfield-Rohr Casket Company without a single write-up of poor performance. Nevertheless, he was discriminated against and fired because the CEO thought he was too old, even though he contributed to the company’s success and profitability for decades.”

What This Means to Counties

This case is important to counties because it emphasizes that age discrimination can be costly. The case exemplifies that employers should be careful, because juries will tend to be sympathetic to employees. All counties should have adopted policies, procedures, and regular training for all personnel to be in compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws.

For more information, visit the EEOC’s website at www.eeoc.gov or contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.