

PUBLICATION

EEOC Sues Taco Bell Franchisee Over Religious Accommodation

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The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently sued a Taco Bell franchisee for enforcing its grooming policy. The claimant, a 25 year old Nazirite, let his hair grow out for eleven years. According to the EEOC's Complaint, "Nazirites do not cut their hair, believing that long hair is a way of showing their devotion to God." Pursuant to the Company's grooming policy, the claimant was given an ultimatum to cut his hair or he would be terminated. He refused to cut his hair, citing his Nazirite beliefs, and he was terminated.

On July 28, 2008, the EEOC filed suit in federal court in North Carolina on his behalf. The EEOC claims that the employer failed to accommodate the employee's sincerely held religious belief. Presumably, the employer will defend the suit by arguing that accommodating long hair in the food-service industry would be unreasonable and impose an undue hardship on the employer that does not require accommodation. What may seem like a common sense operational policy that is designed to foster hygiene in the food-service industry, could result in employer liability or costly litigation.