



MUSLIM FLIGHT ATTENDANT SAYS SHE WAS SUSPENDED FOR REFUSING TO SERVE ALCOHOL

News / Airlines



A Muslim flight attendant says she was suspended by ExpressJet for refusing to serve alcohol in accordance with her Islamic faith.

In a bid to get her job back, Charee Stanley filed a discrimination complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Tuesday for the revocation of a reasonable religious accommodation.

She wants to do her job without serving alcohol in accordance with her Islamic faith - just as she was doing before her suspension, her lawyer said.

"What this case comes down to is no one should have to choose between their career and religion and it's incumbent upon employers to provide a safe environment where employees can feel they can practice their religion freely," said Lena Masri, an attorney with Michigan chapter of the

Council on American-Islamic Relations.

Stanley, 47, started working for ExpressJet nearly three years ago. About two years ago she converted to Islam. This year she learned her faith prohibits her from not only consuming alcohol but serving it, too, Masri said.

She approached her supervisor on June 1 and was told to work out an arrangement for someone to fulfill passenger requests for alcohol.

"It was at the direction of the airlines that she began coordinating with the other flight attendant on duty so that when a passenger requested alcohol, the other flight attendant would accommodate that request," Masri said. "We know that this arrangement has worked beautifully and without incident and that it hasn't caused any undue burden on the airline. After all, it was the suggestion of the airline."

It seemed to be working out until another flight attendant filed a complaint against Stanley on August 2 claiming she was not fulfilling her duties by refusing to serve alcohol, Masri said. The employee complaint also said Stanley had a book with "foreign writings" and wore a headdress.

On August 25, the airline sent a letter to Stanley informing her that it was revoking its religious accommodation to exclude her from service of alcohol and placing her on administrative leave.

"They have paid her unpaid leave and they advised her that her employment may be terminated after 12 months," Masri said. "We are requesting that her employment be reinstated and the accommodation of her religious beliefs be reinstated as well."

A spokesman for ExpressJet declined to discuss Stanley's complaint.

"At ExpressJet, we embrace and respect the values of all of our team members. We are an equal opportunity employer with a long history of diversity in our workforce. As Ms. Stanley is an employee, we are not able to comment on her personnel matters," spokesman Jarek Beem said in an email.

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