Papa John’s Pizza to Settle Discrimination Suit with Program to Recruit and Hire People with Disabilities

Employee with an Intellectual Disability was Terminated Due to Use of a Job Coach

The Disability Law Center (DLC) announced settlement in the case of EEOC v. PJ Utah LLC, PJ Cheese, Inc., Case No. 2:14-cv-00695-TC. In order to resolve the lawsuit, Papa John’s will pay $125,000 and has agreed to provisions that include efforts to hire and recruit people with disabilities. Additionally, the settlement provides for robust training for Papa John’s staff regarding their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The DLC represented Scott Bonn (Mr. Bonn) throughout the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s (EEOC’s) administrative process and then intervened when the EEOC initiated an action in federal court alleging that Papa John’s had violated the ADA. The EEOC’s suit asserted that Mr. Bonn worked successfully at Papa John’s for approximately 5 months with the assistance of an independently funded job coach. The suit further alleged that after a company representative observed Mr. Bonn working with the job coach, his employment was terminated. The ADA requires that employers provide reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities and the EEOC’s suit alleged that Mr. Bonn’s job coach was just such an appropriate and necessary accommodation.

Laura Boswell Henrie, Supervising Attorney at the DLC and counsel for Mr. Bonn, noted, “It is crucial for employers to live up to the standards set by the ADA and provide reasonable accommodations so that individuals with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in the workforce.” Ms. Henrie went on to say that “The failure to recognize a job coach as one possible reasonable accommodation severely limits the opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to access meaningful employment. We are hopeful that the settlement reached in this case will serve to educate employers about the skills and expertise Scott, and employees like him, can bring to bear when properly accommodated.”

“Scott loved working at Papa John’s and was hurt when he was terminated. We are pleased that they now recognize a job coach as a reasonable accommodation and will not do this to anyone else,” said Bill Bonn, father of Scott Bonn. “We are excited that Papa John’s will begin to actively recruit and hire people with disabilities. This is a pool of potential employees who are underutilized and who want to work. They are some of the most loyal employees anyone can find. We are grateful to the DLC, especially Laura Henrie for almost 5 years of support.”

In addition to the monetary settlement benefitting Mr. Bonn, the terms of the consent decree are designed to impact more than just a single employee. The settlement stipulates that Papa John’s will review its equal employment policies in tandem with the recruitment and training provisions. The aggregate effect of these conditions is intended to improve the opportunities for all of Papa John’s employees with disabilities in the state of Utah.

The Disability Law Center is a private non-profit organization. The DLC’s mission is to enforce and strengthen laws that protect the opportunities, choices and legal rights of Utahns with disabilities. Our services are available statewide and free of charge, regardless of income, legal status, language, or place of residence.
For more information, interviews, or photos please contact Laura Henrie at (801) 363-1347, or email at lhenrie@disabilitylawcenter.org.