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Rite Aid Ordered To Pay Employee \$500K In Harassment Suit

April 11, 2011

Rite Aid must pay \$500,000 in damages to a former longtime employee who claims she was harassed after suffering an on-the-job injury, a Los Angeles Superior Court jury determined today.

Doreen Betson sued the drug store chain in December 2009, claiming workplace disability harassment, failure to reasonably accommodate her because of her disability and defamation.

The jury agreed with her on the harassment claim, but not on the others.

The panel also declined to award her any damages for lost past and future wages.

Betson worked as a shift supervisor at the Beverly Hills store in February 2008 when she fell on the job and suffered multiple injuries, including torn ligaments in one knee, according to her court papers.

She says her bosses were unhappy that she took medical leave. When she returned after 3 1/2 months, they accused her of faking her injuries and called her 'kangaroo' and 'too slow of a worker,' according to her court papers.

Betson was fired in January 2009 amid accusations by the company that she stole money, an allegation she denied.

Defense attorney Glenn Briggs told jurors during final arguments last week that store video from Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 2008 showed no customers present during three transactions during which Betson claimed she was processing refunds. He said that in one of those cases, she put the refund slip in her back pocket.

Betson, 48, said outside the courtroom that she was pleased with the verdict.

She said she has been unable to get another job because prospective employers ask her why she was fired and do not offer her employment when she tells them she was accused of taking money from Rite Aid.

Although she was fired, Betson did not sue for wrongful termination.

She said she could not remember all of the details of the refund transactions because they took place weeks before she lost her job.

Briggs denied Betson was defamed when her bosses told her she was fired for stealing.

Betson, not her supervisors, repeated that accusation against her to others, Briggs said.

Betson was hired by the company in 1987, when the stores were part of a chain called Thrifty Drug.

Betson says she committed no wrongdoing and that parts of the refund processes at issue occurred outside the range of the store video camera.

``In my entire 21 years with Rite Aid, I never stole money, merchandise or any item at any time,' Betson stated in her court papers. ``The customers for whom I performed cash refunds ... received the full amount back for the return items they brought to the store.'

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