



Equal Rights Advocates

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Press Release

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EMPLOYEES CHALLENGE SEXUAL AND RACIAL HARASSMENT AT SAN FRANCISCO'S LORI'S DINER IN LAWSUIT FILED TODAY

San Francisco, CA (December 16, 2004) – Egregious sexual and racial harassment at San Francisco restaurant chain Lori's Diner has prompted four former and current female wait staff to file suit today in San Francisco Superior Court against the chain's owners. Plaintiffs Jasmine Donaldson, Stephanie Rishell, Jessica Burnette, and Melinda Standing have brought suit against Lori's Diner International, Inc., and JT Cheon Enterprises, Inc., alleging various violations of their civil rights and privacy.

According to the complaint filed today, Lori's Diner demonstrated a flagrant disregard for the law by failing to implement or enforce policies prohibiting sexual and racial harassment. Plaintiffs contend that management did not fire repeated sexual predators among its ranks, and instead allowed them to continue to harass others at other locations. The women charge that Lori's Diner lacked a complaint procedure and that complaints were either ignored or met with retaliation by management. Specific complaints set forth in the suit include:

- The women were groped and propositioned sexually by Lori's Diner co-workers and managers alike.
- Male employees stalked the women using personal information obtained from employee records. Management took no action to protect this personal information even after learning of the stalking.
- Male employees created a peep-hole in the locker room to spy on female employees as they undressed.
- Management did not notify women workers about the peep-hole and left it unrepaired for months.
- Plaintiff Jasmine Donaldson, who is African-American, was also subjected to offensive racial slurs and commentary by co-workers and management.

The plaintiffs are represented by Equal Rights Advocates, a non-profit women's legal advocacy organization, and Hunter Pyle of the law firm of Sundeen, Salinas, Romell & Pyle. The women's claims were brought to ERA's attention by Young Workers United, a San Francisco-based organization of young sector workers fighting for respect on the job, as well as improvements in the quality of jobs in the restaurant industry.

ERA's lead counsel, Noreen Farrell, said: "On its website, Lori's Diner boasts that 'it is a time machine to take you back to the good old days of the fabulous 1950's.' Lori's Diner certainly has operated its restaurants as though it were the 1950's, when there were no civil rights laws to protect women from being groped, propositioned, and spied on when changing."

Farrell hopes the case will have broader implications for women in the restaurant industry. She stated: "The majority of the 12 million employees who work in the restaurant industry nationwide are women. Studies have shown that women in this industry are generally young, underpaid, and especially susceptible to sexual harassment. We hope this lawsuit sends a message to restaurants across the Bay Area - we simply will not tolerate this in our own back yard."

Plaintiffs seek damages and injunctive relief for violations of the California Fair Employment and Housing Act, their right of privacy provided by the California Constitution, and other state laws.

Equal Rights Advocates (www.equalrights.org) has led the legal fight for women's equality for 30 years. Since 1974, ERA's mission has been to protect and secure equal rights and economic opportunities for women and girls through litigation and advocacy.

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