

Lawsuit: Lesbian Bartender Sues Red Lobster for Discrimination

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23, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A former Red Lobster

bartender has sued the restaurant chain, saying her supervisor abused and discriminated against her for being a butch lesbian.

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*Employment Attorney
Chambord Benton-Hayes*

For 11 years, Nora Nunez, 42, of San Francisco worked for Red Lobster in the California cities of Monrovia, Ontario and most recently San Bernardino, the location where a prejudiced supervisor “treated her differently due to her sexual orientation and gender expression,” says the lawsuit filed on Feb. 22.

Red Lobster terminated Nunez in 2022, after she asked the supervisor why he went against company Covid-19 policy and local regulations, and endangered diners and co-workers by forcing a sick employee to work.

“All of us should expect a restaurant chain to value safety and fair treatment for its employees and the general public,” says attorney [Chambord Benton-Hayes](#), whose Oakland, Calif.-based [Benton Employment Law](#) filed the complaint.

“In this case, not only did Red Lobster let prejudice ruin the career of a bartender who was beloved by customers, it also put the public at risk by ignoring her concerns about Covid-19 safety in the workplace,” Benton-Hayes says.

Nunez is not alone, says Benton-Hayes, who has seen a spike in service worker complaints of discrimination and harassment in the food and hospitality industry – even at national chains with policies against such abuses.

Nunez was popular with guests for her care and hospitality, as described by some of her customers in letters they sent to Red Lobster’s corporate offices, according to the lawsuit.

“What happened to me at Red Lobster showed me that prejudice still has a seat at the table, even at a national chain that pretends to be about warmth and hospitality,” Nunez says. “I’m

fighting back, not just for my own sake, but to challenge a system that allows discrimination to infect the workplace.”

Nunez’s thriving career at Red Lobster took a turn when Michael Waller became her general manager. The lawsuit states that Waller targeted her relentlessly for her sexual orientation and repeated negative stereotypes about butch lesbians.

Waller, in addition to ignoring Nunez’s concerns that he was violating policies around Covid-19, displayed his ire towards Nunez by placing her on an unpaid suspension after she reported he had committed an OSHA violation, the lawsuit states.

Around June 2022, after Waller’s mistreatment had escalated, Nunez complained to her supervisor and Red Lobster’s director of operations, Geoff Reder. Reder reassured her that it would be “okay” and that he would discuss the issue with Waller, but no formal investigation was conducted and the mistreatment and discrimination only escalated, the lawsuit says.

Because of the intolerable work environment, Nunez filed a workers’ compensation claim for stress, anxiety and psychological trauma. One week later, Reder and Waller terminated her, which the lawsuit alleges was retaliatory.

The lawsuit filed Feb. 22 in San Francisco County Superior Court (Case No. CGC-24-612576) names Red Lobster Hospitality LLC, Waller and Reder as defendants and alleges that the restaurant chain violated the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) by failing to prevent discrimination based on gender identity/expression and sexual orientation. The lawsuit’s other allegations include harassment, retaliation, wrongful termination and infliction of emotional distress..

Chambord Benton-Hayes successfully represents clients in litigation and arbitration concerning sexual harassment, various forms of discrimination, retaliation, wrongful termination, and harassment, both individually and in class actions. Additionally, she negotiates executive compensation and severance agreements, employing either strategic negotiation or assertive litigation based on the case needs, backed by substantial experience.

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