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Statement of Gloria Allred

Today we filed a race discrimination lawsuit against Walmart on behalf of Essie Grundy.

On January 12, 2018, (Essie's birthday) she went to the Walmart located at 1800 N. Perris Blvd., in Perris, California to purchase a skin cream often used by African Americans. She located it in the store, but discovered that the cream and other hair products meant for African Americans had been locked away behind glass shelves and were segregated from products for non-African Americans. The hair and body products for customers of other races were on open shelves at this store and were not behind locked glass.

Essie asked the store employee why the African American products were locked down while the non-African American products were not. She was told by the employee that it was a directive from corporate headquarters and that he himself had complained about the policy but had obtained no relief. She was also told that she would need to be escorted to the cash register with the product so she could purchase it. Essie was stunned-she felt like she was socked in the stomach and it brought tears to her eyes to see the discriminatory practices firsthand. She asked to speak to a manager and told the manager that she felt like African Americans were being discriminated against and not wanted. As her concerns were not addressed, she left the store.

As this is the neighborhood store, Essie was compelled to return on at least three other occasions after January 12, 2018 to purchase products for African Americans. On each of these occasions, Essie observed the same policy and practice at the store—the hair and body products meant for African Americans had been locked away behind glass shelves, segregated from products for non-African Americans. She also noticed that other customers were staring at her while she was waiting for assistance to have the product unlocked. She felt shame and humiliation—as though people viewed her as a criminal. Essie has been a law-

abiding citizen her whole life and could not believe she was being singled out because of her race.

On January 25, 2018, Essie returned to the same Walmart because it was the Walmart closest to her home. She needed to purchase a comb for her hair. The comb costs forty-eight cents (\$0.48). Despite the low value of the product, it was locked up behind the glass shelves. She again had to call for assistance to have it unlocked and was then escorted to the cash register with the comb. She was not given the product until she paid for it. Essie again noted that the combs for non-African American hair, many of which were more expensive, were not locked in the glass shelves.

As a result of this discriminatory business practice and policy, we filed a lawsuit this morning against Walmart in Riverside County, where this Walmart store is located.

We allege that Walmart has violated California's Unruh Civil Rights Act, (California Civil Code § 51 which prohibits businesses from discriminating against customers on account of their race.)

We are seeking damages, declaratory relief and a permanent injunction against Walmart.

We also allege that Walmart has engaged in unlawful business practices in violation of California's Business and Professions Code Section 17200, and Essie has brought this action on behalf of herself and the general public to stop Walmart's business practice which we contend perpetuates discrimination and which we contend causes Essie and the general public to suffer irreparable injury, shame, humiliation and mental suffering.

This important issue is not limited to California. It is a national issue. Reportedly Walmart also engages in the same policy and practice of locking up and segregating hair and skin products for African Americans in some Walmart stores in other states, e.g. Virginia and North Carolina.

Previously, Walmart has tried to justify this racial discrimination policy and practice by stating that "the protective packaging was part of a normal practice to minimize theft of at-risk items."

We disagree. We believe that if Walmart is concerned about security, it should lock up the shelves of all products.

What appears to be racial profiling of African American customers must end. We think that it perpetuates a racial stereotype that African American customers should be suspected of being thieves and criminals.

Essie and her family have suffered enough. We are looking to the courts and the civil justice system to protect them and restore to them the respect, the dignity, and the equal protection under the law that they are entitled to enjoy.

Gloria Allred
Attorney at Law
Representing Essie Grundy
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