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Today we are here to announce that we have filed a charge of gender and religious discrimination with the United States Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission in New York City on behalf of Lauren Odes against her former employer Native Intimates.

Lauren Odes began working at Native Intimates's headquarters on April 24, 2012. Prior to commencing her employment, she met with two supervisors at the company. Both supervisors were impressed by Ms. Odes's qualifications and relevant experience, and she was offered a position within hours of interviewing. Ms. Odes was assigned to work at a desk off to the side of the office. Her responsibilities included primarily data entry and coordinating the shipment of samples to and from customers, tasks that required little interaction with coworkers.

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm accompanying Ms. Odes's hiring was quickly lost in a shocking series of events, during which Ms. Odes's supervisors complained repeatedly about her attire and physical appearance. On Thursday,

April 26 – two days after she started working at Native Intimates – Ms. Odes wore a dress that covered her clavicle bone, had three-quarter length sleeves, and fell slightly above the knee (she also wore high boots to the knee and stockings). The dress was neither revealing nor inappropriate and would be acceptable in nearly any office setting, much less a production back office where the garb of her colleagues was decidedly casual. Nonetheless, she was promptly pulled aside by her supervisors who warned that the company’s Orthodox Jewish owner saw what she was wearing and disapproved. She was told that the owner had indicated that she was drawing attention from others and should not wear the outfit for her own safety. She was told to dress differently and to wear different lipstick, even though Ms. Odes was wearing a colorless lip balm. When Ms. Odes expressed surprise at these instructions, she was told by a supervisor that “[y]ou are just too hot for this office. Maybe you should wear your boyfriend’s T-shirt and sweat pants.”

The following Monday, Ms. Odes arrived in a gray T-shirt as suggested, along with black leggings and rain boots. Nonetheless, a supervisor again informed Ms. Odes that the owner and office manager were complaining. Ms. Odes alleges that the supervisor suggested that Lauren try taping her breasts down to make them appear smaller.

Despite these increasingly outlandish comments, Ms. Odes tried accommodating her employer, and she arrived at work the next day, Tuesday, May 1, in a black dress which fell to her knees along with stockings and high boots. But Ms. Odes was told by the company to go across the street and buy a new outfit. A supervisor falsely stated that Lauren's bra straps were showing in the back, and suggested that Ms. Odes purchase a "sweater that comes down to your ankles as an outfit." As an alternative, the supervisor pulled an oversized, bright red bathrobe from a sample rack, and suggested that Ms. Odes wear it over her outfit. When Ms. Odes did as instructed, other employees laughed at her, and she was subjected to open ridicule as she sat at her desk in a bathrobe.

After 15 minutes of enduring this abuse, Ms. Odes broke down crying and agreed to go out to buy a new sweater. Before she could even cross the street, however, she received a phone call terminating her employment. We allege in our EEOC charge that she was simply fired for being attractive and for not conforming to the religious strictures imposed by top management, apparently for having female body parts, despite having ably performed her professional duties. If she fully ascribed to her managers' religious beliefs and dressed in accordance with their religious rules governing women's garb, Ms. Odes would not have been fired.

After being abruptly terminated, Ms. Odes returned to the office to speak with her employers about her experience. She recorded those conversations, and the content is remarkable. The statements made by the supervisor corroborate the allegations that Lauren has made. That recording will be provided to the EEOC upon request and will be admissible in a court of law if it is necessary to file a lawsuit in this matter.

The company's treatment of Ms. Odes was particularly ironic, considering that it sells women's undergarments and keeps a showroom packed with bras, lingerie, and other intimate apparel. Far more importantly, the treatment was discriminatory, profoundly humiliating, and unlawful. Ms. Odes was ultimately terminated – despite her best efforts to comply with increasingly onerous demands – because she is a woman who failed to adhere to her managers' religious beliefs.

No woman should be subjected to statements in the work place about the size of her breasts nor should it ever be suggested to a woman that she tape down her breasts. Also, no woman should be told that her breasts were too large, her body too appealing and her appearance too attractive for the comfort of the male

leadership of that company. Further, no woman should be told as Lauren alleges that she was that she was too attractive and that it was a “safety” issue for her because the men at the company would not be able to resist her.

We have asked the EEOC to investigate these allegations and we look forward to the results.

Gloria Allred
Attorney at Law
Representing Lauren Odes
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