



Department of Fair Employment & Housing

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DFEH Sues Cisco Systems, Inc. And Former Managers For Caste-Based Discrimination *Federal Suit Alleges Managers Discriminated Against Engineer Because He is Dalit, Formerly Known as "Untouchable"*

Sacramento – The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) filed a federal lawsuit today under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended (Title VII), and California's Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), against Cisco Systems, Inc. (Cisco) and two managers for discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.

The lawsuit alleges that managers at Cisco's San Jose headquarters campus, which employs a predominantly South Asian workforce, harassed, discriminated, and retaliated against an engineer because he is Dalit Indian, a population once known as the "untouchables" under India's centuries-old caste system. A 2018 survey of South Asians in the U.S. found that 67% of Dalits reported being treated unfairly at their American workplaces.

The lawsuit alleges that Complainant was expected to accept a caste hierarchy within the workplace where he held the lowest status within a team of higher-caste colleagues, receiving less pay, fewer opportunities, and other inferior terms and conditions of employment because of his religion, ancestry, national origin/ethnicity, and race/color.

"It is unacceptable for workplace conditions and opportunities to be determined by a hereditary social status determined by birth," said DFEH Director Kevin Kish. "Employers must be prepared to prevent, remedy, and deter unlawful conduct against workers because of caste."

On January 1, 2020, California Assembly Bill No. 1820 went into effect, authorizing DFEH to file lawsuits for violations of certain federal civil rights laws, including Title VII.

Chief Counsel Janette Wipper, Senior Staff Counsel Siri Thanasombat, and Staff Counsel Jeanette Hawn represent DFEH in this matter. The case is captioned Department of Fair Employment and Housing v. Cisco Systems, Inc., et al., Case No. 5:20-cv-04374 (Northern District of California).

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The DFEH is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. The mission of the DFEH is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit the DFEH's web site at www.dfeh.ca.gov.

