

TV Anchor Says She Was Fired For Making COVID Complaints

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By **Ethan Beberness**

Law360 (April 30, 2021, 6:20 PM EDT) -- A Michigan television journalist has hit her former employer with a sex discrimination and retaliation suit, claiming the station was more lax with COVID-19 safety protocols for male employees than females and then fired her after she complained of disparate treatment.

Former WZZM news anchor Shanna Grove claimed in a complaint filed Thursday that the Grand Rapids-based station took a laissez-faire approach to COVID-19 safety among male staff and admonished Grove and another female reporter for complaining, attempting to track down the source of the ethics complaints Grove filed confidentially with station owner Tegna Inc. before firing her in February.

Grove said she "was personally aware the majority of employees who violated COVID-19 protocols were men, yet none of the male offenders were terminated for failing and refusing to follow safety guidelines."

Grove first complained to Tegna's human resources department on Nov. 25, alleging station management required her to report to the studio for work while allowing others to work remotely and did not enforce COVID-19 protocols across the newsroom.

Grove alleged in her complaint that station management lacked a contact tracing procedure and allowed COVID-19-exposed and infected employees to enter the workplace without informing staff, which she says favored male employees almost exclusively.

Grove also said WZZM management requested that she expand her presence in the newsroom and in the field, despite Grove's assertion that "she was the only reporter required to physically report to WZZM" in spite of the company's COVID-19-related shifts to remote work.

The other female reporter, according to Grove, was "seriously infected" by the coronavirus after she raised her complaints with the station's general manager that cameramen were not wearing masks. The same manager responded to Grove's complaints about safety issues by calling Grove "entitled," according to the complaint.

Grove claims that she informed Tegna on Nov. 25 after no change occurred as a result of her initial complaints to her general manager, reiterating her COVID-safety complaints, reporting her manager's "inappropriate comments about entitlement" and asserting her

"belief that there existed a culture of fear at WZZM."

Grove says she followed up on her complaint to Tegna on Dec. 4 by reporting COVID-19 direct and indirect exposures in the workplace in a phone conversation with Tegna's human relations head. Grove also said that she feared repercussions in the workplace as a result of her complaints.

Those repercussions surfaced a few days later when Grove was denied anchor opportunities she believed she had earned, according to the complaint. Grove says she reported this incident and told Tegna HR that the general manager was seeking to identify who had been making complaints about WZZM to their department.

In addition to the allegedly disparate enforcement of COVID-19 protocols on the basis of sex, Grove also notes that her termination immediately followed time she took off to euthanize her dying cat and alleges that a male WZZM anchor had been given a significantly more flexible schedule when his dog fell ill and died.

Grove says she believed the station's news director had found another anchor for the weekend of Feb. 13-14 during which her cat was euthanized. On Feb. 15, a day that Grove says she was scheduled to have off, she was called into a mandatory meeting and terminated.

Grove brings claims of sexual discrimination and retaliation, both under Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.

She seeks compensation for lost wages and other damages, as well as other unspecified compensation for intangible damages and related attorney fees.

Counsel for Grove did not respond to requests for comment.

Grove is represented by James C. Baker of [Sterling Attorneys at Law PC](#).

Counsel information for WZZM was not available on Friday.

The case is Grove v. WZZM et al., case number [1:21-cv-00354](#), in the U.S. District Court for the District of Western Michigan.

--Editing by Ellen Johnson.

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