

U.S. Navy Veteran Brings Discrimination Suit Against Verizon

Written by Australian Business

NEW YORK, NY, October 08, 2013 **/24-7PressRelease/** -- What began as a routine conference call with a new supervisor quickly and dramatically altered the course of U.S. Navy Veteran Paul Figueroa's career with Verizon Business Networks. This single conversation put into motion a string of events that ultimately led to Figueroa filing a complaint with the Southern District of New York.

On May 23, 2011, Figueroa, at the time a Senior Exchange Architect for Verizon, participated in a conference call with his colleague, Gregory Tsaknakis, and new supervisor, Prerak Mehta. During the course of the call, Mehta allegedly said to Figueroa, who is of Ecuadorian descent, "All you Spanish people are all alike--lazy and don't want to work or listen. All you veterans are all alike--looking for a handout. All you veterans and... soldiers should go back to Afghanistan and die."

Appalled by Mehta's comments, both Figueroa and Tsaknakis allegedly complained to Cyrus Dennis, Director of IT and Integration. Dennis allegedly responded by claiming that he, too, is a veteran and that, as veterans, he and Figueroa had defended the freedom of speech of which Mehta was allegedly taking advantage. Figueroa alleges that he protested that Mehta was not using his freedom of speech but that his comments evidenced his discriminatory feelings towards veterans and individuals of Hispanic descent. Dennis then recommended that Figueroa take a week or two of paid leave to diffuse the situation.

When Figueroa returned to the office during the second week of June 2011, Figueroa claims he was removed from all of his projects, save for a sporadic assignment with JetBlue. Then, he submitted his hours for the first quarter of 2011, for which he allegedly should have been awarded a bonus. He was allegedly the only employee who did not receive a bonus.

In July 2011, Figueroa and Tsaknakis began working under Sarah Lehne, who allegedly informed them that she did not have any projects, and they would need to find their own. Notably, employees who did not complain about discrimination were given assignments and not required to find their own. As a result, neither Figueroa nor Tsaknakis were able to meet Verizon's minimum quarterly requirement of 480 billable hours.

In October 2011, Figueroa and Tsaknakis were allegedly placed in an employee evaluation program, due to failure to meet the billable requirement. Figueroa refused to sign the paperwork and reiterated that he believed that his placement in this program was the result of his complaints about Mehta's discriminatory comments. Throughout the month, Figueroa allegedly repeated the above complaint and Verizon's failure to pay his bonus to Dennis and Lehne. When he realized that his complaints to his various managers were not being acted upon, he

requested that Lehne facilitate a meeting with Verizon Human Resources representatives.

In January 2012, Verizon allegedly contacted Figueroa to commence an internal investigation into his complaints. Figueroa claims that he explained Mehta's comments, his and Tsaknakis' complaints, and the subsequent retaliation to which they were subjected. Figueroa was allegedly assured that his complaints would be investigated.

In March 2012, Figueroa was terminated. He was allegedly told that it was due to using his company credit card for personal expenses. However, when Figueroa began his employment with Verizon, Dennis had allegedly told him that this was an acceptable practice, as long as Figueroa paid these charges back in full. Figueroa alleges he had always complied with this requirement.

The Queens, NY, law firm, White, Ricotta and Marks, P.C., a boutique firm specializing in employment law, is representing the Figueroa in this matter. Thomas Ricotta, a partner in the firm, says that they see this as "a gross and obvious case of race- and military status-based discrimination," and are "passionate about securing justice and remuneration for Figueroa."

About the White, Ricotta & Marks, P.C., Group

The law office of White, Ricotta & Marks, P.C., www.queensemploymentattorney.com focuses expressly on employment law and discrimination in the workplace. The boutique group operates a main office in Jackson Heights, NY, and an additional office in Westbury, Long Island, NY. They serve clients in Manhattan, Astoria, Bayside, Corona, Elmhurst, Flushing, Forest Hills, Howard Beach, Jamaica, Kew Gardens, Ozone Park, Richmond Hill, Douglaston, Great Neck and Little Neck, as well as in the boroughs of Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens, and throughout Nassau County.