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March 19, 2018

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ACLU OF KANSAS FILES COMPLAINT AGAINST SPIRIT BOEING EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

OVERLAND PARK, KS --- Today, the ACLU of Kansas filed a complaint against Spirit Boeing Employees' Association (SBEA) for racial profiling and blatant religious discrimination against Munir Zaniel, a dues-paying member of the association.

In September 2017, Zaniel rented SBEA's recreational lake in Wichita to host a party to celebrate Malaysian Independence Day and Eid-al Adhara. The celebration included a Malaysian flag and involved guests of Malaysian Indian ancestry, some of whom were wearing hijabs.

Following the party, SBEA filed a complaint with Spirit Aerosystems, Zaniel's employer, alleging that Zaniel and his guests were in possession of an ISIS flag and were conducting an ISIS meeting on SBEA property. In response, Spirit Aerosystems filed a complaint with the FBI, alleging that a "group dressed in Muslim garb" with "an American flag desecrated with ISIS symbols" had gathered on the property.

In October, after speaking to Zaniel and determining that the "desecrated flag" was a Malaysian flag, the FBI closed its investigation. SBEA, however, obtained a private investigator to continue investigating the incident and terminated Zaniel's rental benefits. At no point in time did SBEA personally discuss the allegations with Zaniel before terminating those benefits, and he was not notified of the termination until he again tried to reserve the recreational facilities at a later date.

The ordeal has caused Zaniel to experience a great deal of stress and anxiety. He is concerned that the investigation could affect his lawful permanent resident status and feels distress and humiliation based on this experience of being singled-out because of his ethnicity, race and religion.

"The racial profiling and religious discrimination experienced by Mr. Zaniel in this situation is abhorrent," said Micah Kubic, executive director of the ACLU of Kansas. "To label someone a terrorist due to their appearance and their celebration of their heritage is shameful, but to continue to use that mislabel as grounds for blatant discrimination—even after it had been discredited by the FBI—is downright reprehensible."

The ACLU of Kansas calls on the Court to enter a permanent injunction directing SBEA to take all affirmative steps necessary to remedy the effects of the illegal and discriminatory incident and award Zaniel compensatory damages for the distress he has endured.

At a time when anti-immigrant extremism and Islamophobia is surging throughout the country, this incident is a painful reminder that our state is not immune to those sentiments. The ACLU of Kansas stands committed to fighting injustice and ensuring that Kansas is a safe and welcoming home to all of its residents.

You can read the full complaint here:

https://www.aclukansas.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/zaniel_v_sbea_complaint.pdf