

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS  
COUNTY DEPARTMENT, LAW DIVISION**

TOMMY R. BENNETT, )  
 )  
 Complainant, )  
 )  
 v. )  
 )  
 RAINBOW PUSH COALITION and )  
 JESSE JACKSON SR., )  
 )  
 Respondents. )

2011L009756  
CALENDAR ROOM C  
Case No. TIME 00:00  
Tort - Intentional

FILED-2  
2011 SEP 16 PM 3:29  
CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY ILLINOIS  
LAW DIVISION  
CLERK

**COMPLAINT AT LAW**

NOW COMES the plaintiff, TOMMY BENNETT ("Plaintiff" or "Mr. Bennett"), by his attorneys, Thomas V. Leverso of the Law Offices of Thomas V. Leverso, and pursuant to the Illinois Human Rights Act, 775 ILCS 5/1-101 *et seq.* (West 2011) and 775 ILCS 5/7A-102(C)(4), complains as follows of the Defendants, RAINBOW PUSH COALITION ("Rainbow PUSH"), and Illinois Company and nonprofit organization, and REVEREND JESSE JACKSON, SR ("Rev. Jackson")(collectively, the "Defendants"). In support thereof, Plaintiff alleges the following:

**PARTIES & VENUE**

1. At all times material, Mr. Bennett is and individual and resided at 7022 South Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60649.
2. Rainbow PUSH is a Chicago-based, Illinois not-for-profit organization, with its headquarters located at 930 East 50th Street Chicago, IL 60615. (Ex. "A", report from the Illinois Secretary of State of this company.)
3. Mr. Bennett was employed with Rainbow Push from July 11, 2007 through December 23, 2009.
4. This controversy arises from said employment by Defendant of Mr. Bennett, and aforementioned employment was based in the City of Chicago, County of Cook, State of Illinois.
5. The majority of the actions, acts, transactions, and/or occurrences described hereinafter occurred in the County of Cook, State of Illinois.

6. Mr. Bennett properly and timely submitted a complaint to the Illinois Department of Human Rights on June 18, 2010. A copy of this same complaint is attached hereto as Ex. "B".
7. The Illinois Department on Human Rights failed to file a formal charge within 365 days, despite being notified of Defendants' severe default. Thus, Mr. Bennett brings this action pursuant to his right to sue, which originated after the 365-day mark. Copy of the default notification is attached as Ex. "C".

#### **ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL COUNTS**

8. Mr. Bennett met Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. in 2000 on a cruise. Mr. Bennett started working for Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. in 2006, as a Community Volunteer Coordinator on his exploratory committee for mayor of Chicago.
9. On or about September 2006, Mr. Bennett began working for Sandi Jackson who was running 7<sup>th</sup> Ward alderman, as the Volunteer Coordinator.
10. Through Jesse Jackson Jr. and Sandi Jackson, Mr. Bennett met Rev. Jackson and started working for Rainbow Push Coalition on July 11, 2007 as a National Director of Community Affairs.
11. As National Director of Community Affairs, Mr. Bennett was in charge of voter registration, volunteer services, the prison program, the legal clinic and membership.
12. Mr. Bennett's sexual orientation, homosexual, was well known at Rainbow Push due to his nationally syndicated talk show, "The Tom Joyner Morning Show." Mr. Bennett's radio personality name is "Aruba Tommy."
13. Almost immediately after Mr. Bennett started, Mr. Bennett experienced discrimination.
14. Caroline Wiggins, the Membership and Volunteer Coordinator, went to Rev. Jackson to speak with him and inform him that she did not want to be under his supervision because Mr. Bennett is homosexual.
15. Rev. Jackson moved Ms. Wiggins from under Mr. Bennett's supervision and put her under the supervision of the Field Director, Rev. Livingston. Mr. Bennett was informed of this by Rev. Livingston.

16. Ms. Wiggins told the entire staff that she was glad that she did not have to answer to Mr. Bennett, a homosexual, and that Rev. Livingston was her boss.
17. Mr. Bennett complained to Rev. Livingston about the transfer. Mr. Bennett met with Rev. Livingston and he was upset about it, but that there was nothing he could do about it because it was a decision that Rev. Jackson had made. Mr. Bennett was instructed by Rev. Livingston that Mr. Bennett should learn to work around Ms. Wiggins.
18. From that point forward, Ms. Wiggins would make a limp wrist gesture towards Mr. Bennett whenever Mr. Bennett walked down the hallway. Mr. Bennett understood the limp wrist gesture to mock his sexual orientation: homosexual.
19. Shortly thereafter the transfer, on or about 2008, Ms. Wiggins led a prayer during a volunteer meeting and in her prayer, heard throughout the office, she stated, "Bind these homosexual spirits that are in the office" and "get these homosexuals out of here and do it in Jesus' name."
20. When Mr. Bennett overheard the prayer, Mr. Bennett arose from his desk and approached Ms. Wiggins, but was intercepted by Felicia McQuitter, who also heard it and instructed Mr. Bennett to leave and avoid confrontation. Willie Duke also heard the prayer. Mr. Bennett was shocked and humiliated by Ms. Wiggins' prayer and understood it to be directed at him as he was the only openly gay individual in the office at the time
21. Soon after, Mr. Bennett filed a complaint Rev. Jackson, Rev. Livingston and Human Resources about Ms. Wiggins' discriminatory conduct.
22. A few weeks later, Mr. Bennett was at an event and ran into Ms. Wiggins' sister, Bonita Parker, and she stated that her sister had joined Rev. Meeks' church and is "saved". It is well known that Rev. Meeks actively preaches against homosexuality.
23. Mr. Bennett was never approached by anyone from Rainbow Push regarding his complaints. Mr. Bennett was never even sent a response to his complaint. To Mr. Bennett's knowledge, no investigation or action was taken in response to his complaint.

24. Ms. Wiggins left soon after Mr. Bennett filed the complaint. To date, Mr. Bennett has no knowledge regarding her reasons for leaving.
25. As director of the legal clinic, Mr. Bennett was responsible for organizing a group of referral attorneys who specialized in different types of law practice. The legal clinic took place on Mondays.
26. Mr. Bennett had a large number of people who came in to the legal clinic for legal assistance with, *inter alia*, expungements of criminal charges.
27. Among the referral attorneys was an attorney named Tamara Holder. Ms. Holder demanded that all cases be referred to her and that she be placed in charge of all attorneys coming into assist with the legal clinic. Ms. Holder instructed Mr. Bennett that she started the clinic, that it was her clinic, and that no cases were to be assigned without her approval. Mr. Bennett understood this to mean that Ms. Holder was assigning the majority of all cases to herself and charging the indignant clients.
28. As Mr. Bennett was in charge of the legal clinic, he complained regarding Ms. Holder's conduct. Mr. Bennett received complaints regarding Ms. Holder's legal services. Mr. Bennett then received a letter from Rev. Jackson stating that Ms. Holder was in charge of the legal clinic. After that, Mr. Bennett refused to organize the legal clinic. Mr. Bennett believe that Ms. Holder was given control over the legal clinic due to sex (female) and orientation (straight), while it was taken away from Mr. Bennett do to his sex (male) and sexual orientation (homosexual).
29. In 2008, at the Rainbow Push Coalition all staff planning meeting for the National Convention, Mr. Bennett requested a LGBT table and discussion. Mr. Bennett was told by Rev. Jackson that it was not part of the agenda. When Mr. Bennett questioned why not, Rev. Jackson cursed at Mr. Bennett in front of all of the staff. Rev. Jackson was visibly upset during the rest of the meeting.
30. Mr. Bennett worked under the supervision of Rev. Gregory Seal Livingston, the National Field Director for Rainbow Push. Under his supervision, Mr. Bennett exceeded all expectations.
31. In 2008, Rev. Livingston went on sick leave to care for his dying mother.

32. Within six months after the death of his mother, Rev. Livingston went on sick leave to care for his dying father.
33. During Rev. Livingston's leaves, Mr. Bennett assumed many of the duties of the National Field Director.
34. Also in 2008, Rev. Jesse Jackson's travel assistant, Shelley Davis, resigned and became the chief of staff for Congressman Sheila Jackson Lee. Mr. Bennett was appointed as Rev. Jackson's travel assistant, under his direct supervision. Mr. Bennett took his orders as travel assistant, directly from the Rev. Jackson.
35. While undertaking many of the duties of the National Field Director, Mr. Bennett was now additionally expected to take over the duties of Shelley Davis, as Rev. Jackson's travel assistant. Mr. Bennett was informed by Chief of Staff John Mitchell that Mr. Bennett was expected to take on these additional duties – both for the National Field Director and as Rev. Jackson's travel assistant.
36. In 2008, shortly after Mr. Bennett took on the additional role of Rev. Jackson's travel assistant, Mr. Bennett complained to Human Resources, Director McKinnon-Price, that he was doing the duties of three positions and spending his own personal money on the road for tips, hotel and car services. No action was taken, despite his complaints.
37. As Rev. Jackson's travel assistant, Mr. Bennett faced additional discrimination due to his sexual orientation. Among other things, Mr. Bennett was subjected to humiliating tasks.
38. It was well known that Ms. Holder was a mistress of Rev. Jackson. As Rev. Jackson's travel assistant, Mr. Bennett had been to Ms. Holder's apartment with Rev. Jackson and was told to wait in the car while he went into her apartment. On several occasions, Mr. Bennett was instructed by Rev. Jackson to escort Ms. Holder to Rev. Jackson's hotel room at the Hilton at Chicago O'Hare airport.
39. On or about November or December 2008, Mr. Bennett was accused by the Chairman of the Board, Martin King, of faxing a letter to the Jackson family

- from Kinkos at 2 a.m. informing them of the affair between Rev. Jackson and Ms. Holder.
40. After Rainbow Push did a thorough investigation of the letter, they found out that the letter came from Judge Vanessa Hobson, who was another mistress of Rev. Jackson.
  41. As Rev. Jackson's travel assistant, Mr. Bennett traveled on all of his business trips around the world.
  42. On travel days, Mr. Bennett was instructed to go to Rev. Jackson's house at 4a.m. to personally pack his clothes and clean out his closet.
  43. On or about May 2008, at around 4a.m., Mr. Bennett was at the Rev. Jackson's home packing his clothes for a trip to Tanzania. Rev. Jackson was not happy with his packing and started screaming, "motherfucker" repeatedly. Despite having his visa for Tanzania and preparing for the trip, Rev. Jackson removed Mr. Bennett from the trip.
  44. Mr. Bennett was instructed by Rev. Jackson during trips to do demeaning and demoralizing tasks, including, but not limited to, escort women to his room after work hours and clean up his room after sexual intercourse with women. Mr. Bennett believes he was forced to do these tasks due to his sexual orientation.
  45. In New York at the Sheraton Hotel on 57<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Mr. Bennett was instructed to escort Ms. Holder to Rev. Jackson's hotel room. In Las Vegas, Nevada, at the Winn Hotel and Resort, Mr. Bennett was instructed to arrange a massage for Rev. Jackson. In Haiti, Mr. Bennett was instructed by Rev. Jackson to escort a young woman to his hotel room after hours.
  46. In 2008, at the Hilton Hotel at Chicago O'Hare Airport, Mr. Bennett was summoned to Rev. Jackson's hotel room and instructed by Rev. Jackson to clean up and pack his things after he had spent the night with Ms. Holder. Rev. Jackson was flying to New York that day. Upon arrival in New York, Mr. Bennett was again summons to Rev. Jackson's room and he informed by Rev. Jackson that he had a rash between his legs. Rev. Jackson instructed Mr. Bennett to go to the drug store to purchase a prescription.

47. Mr. Bennett picked up the prescription and brought it back to his room. Rev. Jackson was wearing white brief underwear and instructed Mr. Bennett to apply the cream on his inner thigh. Mr. Bennett refused. Rev. Jackson became very angry and called Mr. Bennett a "little motherfucker."
48. Another time at the Hilton at Chicago O'Hare, Mr. Bennett was summoned to Rev. Jackson's room at 1.am. to take notes. Prior to that, at dinner, Mr. Bennett retrieved Cialis from his room (from a small fold over Tiffany's pouch) and brought it to him at dinner. When Mr. Bennett arrived, Rev. Jackson was dressed only in his underwear (briefs) and a v-neck t-shirt. While Mr. Bennett was talking notes, Rev. Jackson had an erection and was stroking his penis with his hand in his underwear. Rev. Jackson's breathing rate was accelerated. Before Mr. Bennett left, Rev. Jackson stated that white folks took the word "gay" and gave the word it's own definition. Rev. Jackson further stated that he was a real poor child in North Carolina and his name was first Jesse Burns, and then Jesse Robinson and then he became Jesse Jackson. Rev. Jackson stated that he played football and there was a gay high school teacher who took Rev. Jackson under his wings and told him that he needed education to go along with football. Rev. Jackson said "from that gay teacher, I got a good grade, I got to use his car, I got ten dollars and I got my dick sucked." Rev. Jackson said, "that's not gay, that is surviving." Mr. Bennett understood this to mean that Rev. Jackson wanted him to perform oral sex on him. Mr. Bennett left the room.
49. Rev. Jackson also made inappropriate gestures toward Mr. Bennett in public. When shaking Mr. Bennett's hand, the Rev. Jackson would always take his middle finger and rub the middle of Mr. Bennett's hand.
50. Mr. Bennett complained to Human Resources that Mr. Bennett was working 60-70 hours per week and doing the job of three separate positions. No action was taken. Mr. Bennett's straight co-workers were not required to do the work of three separate positions.
51. Mr. Bennett made Rev. Jackson aware on numerous occasions that Mr. Bennett was uncomfortable cleaning up his hotel rooms, escorting women to

his hotel room, being summoned to his hotel room after hours or packing his clothes.

52. In the beginning of 2009, Dexter Clinkscale became Rev. Jackson's travel assistant. During the Spring 2009, Mr. Clinkscale had a 24 year-old male intern from Texas in his office. In April 2009, Mr. Bennett was on his way to Club Escape to meet friends. This intern asked to join because he stated that he wanted to go out to a gay bar. Mr. Bennett and the intern met up with Darius Mayfield and Carl Grant. A month later, the intern stated that Mr. Bennett took him to a gay bar and propositioned him and that they smoked marijuana.
53. From May 2009 to December 2009, Mr. Bennett was on paid leave pending investigation. Mr. Bennett was also made to take a drug test. The drug test came back negative. The personal director conducted an investigation and determined that the allegations were not true.
54. Mr. Bennett never received findings of the investigations. The Human Resources Director McKinnon-Price, told Mr. Bennett that the case was not handled correctly and that she suggested Mr. Bennett return to work.
55. Mr. Bennett believes there was no merit to the allegations and that the investigation was prolonged due to his sexual orientation. In contrast, his complaints were never investigated.
56. On or about December 23, 2009, Mr. Bennett received a letter stating Mr. Bennett was being laid-off due to lack of funding.
57. Based on knowledge and belief, Johnny Savory, was hired to replace Mr. Bennett. Several other additional employees were also hired after Mr. Bennett was laid off.

#### **COUNT I - SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

58. Plaintiff restates and realleges paragraphs 1-57 and incorporates them by reference as Paragraph 58.
59. Mr. Bennett suffered the intentional, unwanted discrimination by Rev. Jackson and Rainbow PUSH employees because of his sex and sexual orientation of being a gay male.



60. The harassment was severe given that the words were derogatory and the actions necessarily required Mr. Bennett to perform unwanted actions that were sexual in nature.
61. The harassment was also pervasive because it lasted the entire time at Rainbow PUSH, from July 11, 2007 through December 23, 2009.
62. The harassment negatively affected the terms, conditions or privileges of Mr. Bennett's work environment by permitting the hostile insults to outwardly and directly impact him. The requested actions further humiliated Mr. Bennett, forcing him to perform sexual acts outside the scope of the jobs.
63. The harassment would detrimentally affect a reasonable person of the same sex and sexual orientation, as was inhibitory in the context of performing the actual functions of both jobs.
64. Management knew about the harassment, or should have known, and did nothing to stop it. As stated hereinabove, Rev. Jackson directly harassed Mr. Bennett in certain instances.
65. As a direct and proximate result of the sexual harassment and other actions, Mr. Bennett has suffered damages from loss of employment and emotional, psychiatric trauma and distress caused.
66. Specifically, Mr. Bennett has lost his apartment, his car, and has paid \$600/month in COBRA health care benefits.

WHEREFORE, Complainant Tommy Bennett prays this Honorable Court enter judgment for him and against Defendants Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., and Rainbow PUSH Coalition for the following amounts:

- A. \$98,300 in back-pay, front-pay and loss of benefits, including but not limited to the COBRA premiums;
- B. \$350,000 for emotional distress and punitive damages; and
- C. Any further relief deemed fair, just, and equitable.

**COUNT II - INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS**

67. Plaintiff restates and realleges paragraphs 1-66 and incorporates them by reference as Paragraph 67.

68. Rev. Jackson, and Ms. Wiggins and the other Rainbow PUSH employees intentionally inflicted insult, disparagement, badgering and cajoling toward Mr. Bennett through the ridiculing comments and statements in the workplace and the exposure to Rev. Jackson's requests.
69. Defendants' conduct was extreme and outrageous, having a theme and/or undertone of sexual orientation.
70. Defendants' acts caused emotional distress to Mr. Bennett in the form of psychological and psychiatric trauma.
71. Mr. Bennett continues to suffer severe emotional distress as a direct and proximate result of defendants' conduct.

WHEREFORE, Complainant Tommy Bennett prays this Honorable Court enter judgment for him and against Defendants Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., and Rainbow PUSH Coalition for the following amounts:

- D. \$98,300 in back-pay, front-pay and loss of benefits, including but not limited to the COBRA premiums;
- E. \$350,000 for emotional distress and punitive damages; and
- F. Any further relief deemed fair, just, and equitable.

PLAINTIFF DEMANDS TRIAL BY 12-PERSON JURY ON ALL MATTERS

WHERE JURY TRIAL MAY BE HAD BY LAW.

TOMMY BENNETT, Plaintiff

By: 

His Attorney

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