Wigdor LLP Files Whistleblower Lawsuit Alleging The Foundation For A Smoke-free World Pushed Harmful Pro-vaping Messaging To Teens

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On January 13, 2021, Wigdor LLP filed a whistleblower retaliation lawsuit on behalf of Lourdes Liz alleging that the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (the "Foundation") exploited and violated its status as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit in promoting Big Tobacco's harmful pro-vaping messaging to teens and coordinating strategies with those for-profit companies.

As set forth in the Complaint, the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World is funded exclusively by Philip Morris International ("PMI") and has reportedly been used as a tool of PMI and its former parent company, Altria (which owns a large stake in JUUL), to promote vaping products as a supposedly "healthier" alternative to cigarettes.

Ms. Liz worked for the Foundation as a Director of Digital and Social Media from February 2018 through February 2020. She alleges that she was subjected to a sustained campaign of retaliation for raising concerns about the organization's efforts to skirt its legal obligations to act independently from its for-profit financial backers, as well as complaining to management about the Foundation's promotion of a pro-vaping message to teens in contravention of its stated mission and independence, which also was to the detriment of public health.

Ms. Liz alleges that, in retaliation for her complaints and objections to these practices, she was passed over for a promotion in favor of a more junior employee who was far less qualified but had not spoken out against the Foundation's questionable relationships with Big Tobacco. Over the course of the next year plus, the Foundation systemically stripped Ms. Liz of her job responsibilities and began issuing baseless performance warnings to create a paper trail and justify her eventual unlawful, retaliatory termination in February 2020, the lawsuit alleges.

Ms. Liz is represented by Wigdor LLP Partner Lawrence M. Pearson.

Statement of Lawrence M. Pearson, Partner at Wigdor LLP:

> "The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World's alleged activities at the direction of and in close coordination with Big Tobacco in violation of its status as a tax-exempt, non-profit organization represent a serious threat to public health. We look forward to holding the Foundation accountable for its alleged attempts to shamelessly silence Ms. Liz after she made it clear that

> she would not support Big Tobacco's pro-teen-vaping agenda."

Read the Full Complaint

Bloomberg Law
"Anti-Smoking Group Sued Over Worker's Claim of Tobacco Ties"
January 13, 2021
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Financial Times
"Anti-smoking group accused of serving interests of tobacco industry"
January 16, 2021
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Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and STOP
"Lawsuit Alleges Collaboration Between Philip Morris International and the Supposedly Independent Foundation for a Smoke-Free World"
January 15, 2021
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Premium Times
"Whistleblower files lawsuit against tobacco foundation"
January 16, 2021
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TheJournal.ie
"Suit filed against anti-smoking group over links to 'Big Tobacco'"
January 16, 2021
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