

Trans 'Hamilton' actor alleges she lost role after requesting gender-neutral dressing room

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A Black transgender actor who was a cast member in the "Hamilton" touring show has filed a federal complaint against the production alleging she lost her role after she asked for a gender-neutral dressing room.

Suni Reid, who goes by pronouns they/them or she/her and is nonbinary, filed a complaint Wednesday with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Los Angeles alleging discrimination and retaliation because, she asserts, she "dared question the supposed 'wokeness' of the company" behind "Hamilton," the acclaimed ensemble musical about Alexander Hamilton and other American historical figures, which is famous for its diverse cast.

One of Reid's lawyers, Lawrence Pearson, said in a statement to USA TODAY that "Hamilton" has been a public "beacon of diversity" with a commitment to social justice and harmony.

"Behind the curtain, however, the company's management will force out a Black, transgender cast member simply because they stood up for themselves and advocated for a more equitable workplace, and therefore called that public image into question," Pearson said in the statement.

Shane Marshall Brown, a spokesman for "Hamilton," told USA TODAY in a statement that Reid was "a valued cast member" for more than three years, and denied the charges in Reid's complaint.

"We offered them a contract to return to 'Hamilton' with terms responsive to their requests," Brown's statement said. "We deny the allegations in the (complaint). We have not discriminated or retaliated against Suni. Since the shutdown, our organization has taken care of our community. We have treated Suni with the same respect and consideration as all the company members of 'Hamilton.'

The statement continued: "Specifically, we have given Suni direct financial support, paid for their health insurance, and paid for their housing. We wish Suni well in their future endeavors."

In an email to USA TODAY, Pearson said Reid will likely soon file a federal lawsuit seeking unspecified "economic damages for financial harm and emotional distress," if the EEOC gives the go-ahead.

He said his client wants the "Hamilton" company "held accountable" and to address the complaints of cast members "with greater respect and a less adversarial approach in the future." The complaint does not specify what accountability Reid seeks.

"We look forward to upholding Mx. Reid's rights and hope this is a wake-up call for the theater industry about the systemic inequities that persist even at its greatest heights," Pearson said.

Besides being a Broadway smash hit, "Hamilton" won multiple Tony Awards and a Pulitzer Prize; a filmed version of the stage musical appeared on Disney+ last year. It was created by Lin-Manuel Miranda, who is of Puerto Rican descent, and cast Black, Latino and Asian actors to tell the story of the founders of the United States through hip-hop, R&B, jazz and Broadway standards.

Reid's lawyer said the actor joined the cast of the show right out of college in 2017 and had played a variety of ensemble and prominent roles in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles productions, including George Washington, Aaron Burr, Hercules Mulligan/James Madison, and Marquis de Lafayette/Thomas Jefferson.

But Reid says the company declined to renew her contract after Reid requested that performers have a gender-neutral dressing room in addition to those for men and women.

"Unfortunately, during Mx. Reid's years with the show, which purports to be an icon of diversity, they have experienced frequent incidents of discrimination and harassment from cast members and management of 'Hamilton' based upon their race, sexual orientation/LGBTQ+ status, gender, and gender identity," Reid's complaint asserts.

Reid also alleges the company "failed to act when certain actors physically threatened or intentionally and repeatedly mis-gendered" Reid, who was open about being transgender and nonbinary. Reid's complaint alleges the "harassment" mostly occurred in the dressing spaces for male performers that Reid had to use as a member of the cast in New York and Chicago.

Reid went on social media "on more than one occasion" to call attention to what she considered issues of racial equity, including the predominance of white executives in upper management, and safety for cast members who are transgender.

In May and June, amid negotiations over renewing Reid's contract, the complaint says, the company said it would cordon off part of the main dressing area using a curtain or sheet. When Reid responded that wasn't good enough in either practical terms or under the law, she alleges management began looking for ways to get rid of Reid and suspended contract negotiations.

"Hamilton's management openly showed their retaliatory animus against Mx. Reid by citing 'problematic' social media posts as the supposed reason for the hold-up, despite the fact that these posts...had been known to the Company for months before Mx. Reid's contract discussions started up again," the complaint asserts.

The company's alleged labeling of Reid as "problematic" perpetuates harmful stereotypes, the complaint asserts, and betrays the company's alleged retaliation to Reid's "daring to question 'Hamilton's' social-equity bona fides" and speaking up against mistreatment, the complaint asserts.

The target of the complaint, and also any subsequent lawsuit, is Adventureland LLC, which handles contractual negotiations and other corporate administrative matters for the Eliza Tour of "Hamilton the Musical."