

J.Crew Sued by Its Former General Counsel

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By Phillip Bantz

Maria DiLorenzo, former senior vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary for J.Crew Group, has sued the retailer for allegedly failing to accommodate her needs related to a disability, including time off to recover from surgery, and firing her after she raised concerns.

According to the complaint, DiLorenzo suffered sudden sensorineural hearing loss in June 2020, which rendered her deaf in one ear and caused vertigo. The lawsuit alleges DiLorenzo was denied accommodations and was fired in December after she complained to president and chief operating officer Michael Nicholson.

Her disability began in the midst of the company's reorganization, the complaint said, and DiLorenzo informed her boss, then-COO Lynda Markoe, that she would need time off for related medical appointments.

J.Crew filed its Chapter 11 paperwork in May 2020, and quickly emerged from bankruptcy after six months.

In the fall of 2020, Nicholson became J.Crew's COO. The complaint alleges that Nicholson discouraged DiLorenzo from taking time off to recover from a surgery related to her condition in November 2020, "weeks short of the necessary recovery period."

Later, the complaint alleges, when Libby Wadle became CEO of the company, she wanted J.Crew executives to return to the office. DiLorenzo said weekly travel from her home in Chicago to the offices in New York would be too difficult in her condition, but she offered to attend quarterly meetings in New York. At those meetings, the complaint alleged, leadership failed to provide accommodations for her hearing loss.

DiLorenzo alleges that the company's human resources leadership was dismissive of her complaints about these issues.

"Only a few months later, J.Crew inexplicably fired Ms. DiLorenzo, claiming—falsely—that the company was purportedly moving in a 'new direction,'" the complaint said.

Although her employment at the retailer was meant to conclude Dec. 31, DiLorenzo alleges Nicholson terminated her Dec. 14. She further alleges Nicholson directly told her the firing was because she had brought claims against the company.

"J. Crew Group is committed to fostering an equitable, safe and inclusive workplace," a company spokesperson said in a statement. "We believe these allegations are without merit and we will defend ourselves vigorously."

DiLorenzo is represented by Wigdor LLP.

“J.Crew wants to reinvent itself post-bankruptcy as a modern, inclusive brand, but the way it treated Ms. DiLorenzo after she became disabled represents the complete antithesis of those ideals,” Wigdor partner Valdi Licul said in a statement. “This is precisely why Congress enacted the ADA and the FMLA decades ago: to protect individuals with disabilities from workplace discrimination and abuse.”

DiLorenzo was part of J.Crew’s legal team when the retailer filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in May 2020. Although the company was touted as the COVID-19 pandemic’s first major retailer to go under, it had amassed billions in debt over the preceding years.

Lizzy McLellan contributed to this report.