

Former employees charge Spirit AeroSystems with laying off sicker and older workers in 2013



WICHITA, KS – Federal charges of discrimination were filed against Spirit AeroSystems, Inc. today alleging the company terminated hundreds of employees in 2013 because they were older and either they or a family member had a costly medical condition the newly self-insured aerospace company wanted to cut.

Filed today with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the charges came from 10 former employees represented by the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001. The union spent the past eight months assisting the employees' investigation of Spirit's actions and their terminations.

The employees are also filing complaints with the federal government's Office of Civil Rights to seek an investigation into whether Spirit illegally disclosed their confidential medical information, or the confidential medical information of their family members. In addition to the named clients, the charges are extended to other impacted employees.

Each agency will now perform their own investigation into the terminations and the company's actions. The charges and federal investigation could bring further action against the company or employees could file a lawsuit against Spirit.

The charges were the subject of a press conference today at SPEEA's Midwest office. Participants included a number of the filing employees and their legal counsel.

"This type of discrimination using confidential medical information is something we did not want to believe a Wichita company would do, let alone do to its own employees," said Bob Brewer, SPEEA Midwest Director. "But, the evidence is clear – Spirit targeted older employees and employees who had medical conditions that cost money the company did not want to spend. These people are now at home, without a job or medical coverage and no way to get the treatment they, or a loved one desperately needs."

Medical conditions in the group include spouses on organ donor transplant lists, children with serious and costly rare medical conditions and employees with cancer and other serious medical issues of their own.

Spirit abruptly terminated 221 SPEEA-represented engineers, technical workers and other professionals on July 25. In all, the company terminated 360 employees that day. All were abruptly called into meetings with management, told they were being terminated and then escorted off the property. Most were not allowed to return to their work stations to retrieve personal property. The terminations included employees who for years were rated as top performers. In recent months, Spirit held a job fair and a "hiring blitz" to attract new employees. None of the laid off employees were asked to return to work.

Just three weeks before the terminations, Spirit changed its medical coverage for employees and families from an underwritten, provider form of medical insurance to a self-funded insurance program. The result of the change is that every dollar not paid out in medical claims is a dollar that remains in Spirit's corporate bank account.

SPEEA represents 2,450 employees at Spirit in Kansas. Overall the union represents 24,400 employees in Washington, Kansas, Oregon, Utah, California and Florida. SPEEA is affiliated with the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE).

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