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Summer Hires and Interns: Teenagers Trained to Bring Legal Claims

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With the arrival of summer, employers may soon hire teenagers for temporary jobs or internships. Employers should be aware of the potential legal liability associated with such hires.

The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) has made a high priority out of a program it calls [Youth@Work](#). EEOC takes the position that teenagers represent one of the most vulnerable segments of the workforce. Youth@Work is a significant outreach campaign whereby EEOC visits local high schools and other organizations. Specifically, through this program, EEOC trains high school students with respect to their rights and obligations concerning discrimination (i.e. race, gender, disability, etc.) and sexual harassment. Additionally, EEOC has established an Internet Web site specifically for teenagers; this site provides information on how to document and pursue claims of workplace discrimination and harassment. ***As a result of these efforts, teenagers have already filed charges of discrimination against their employers!***

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Even if teenagers have not received EEOC training, it is important to remember that younger workers have lived their entire lives in a more “politically correct” culture than previous generations. As a result, younger workers may be more sensitive to crude language or other unprofessional conduct than their more mature co-workers. In today's litigious environment, inappropriate remarks and conduct are more likely to lead to a lawsuit than in the past.

Employers should take reasonable steps to assure that interns and summer employees are not subjected to discrimination or harassment. Prior to the summer, an employer should take the opportunity to review its employee handbook to ensure that adequate anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies are in place. Most importantly, employers should ensure its managers and employees are familiar with such policies and procedures, and that they are followed. Even where an employee engages in discriminatory conduct in violation of company policy, an employer can sometimes avoid liability where it has an effective anti-discrimination policy and makes good faith efforts to comply with it.

An employer can reduce its potential liability for discrimination lawsuits by following these suggestions. Unfortunately, even the most careful employers can face employment-related claims. If you are faced with an employment-related claim, a Ruden McClosky employment or litigation attorney is prepared to aggressively defend your interests.

If you have questions regarding this topic or would like to have your employee handbook reviewed or updated, contact Daniel Matlow, 954-527-2475 or daniel.matlow@ruden.com, or any Ruden McClosky labor & employment law attorney. Daniel Matlow is a partner in Ruden McClosky's Litigation Practice Group, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. For more information about Ruden McClosky please visit www.ruden.com.