

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
ILLINOIS

Shannon Guthrie v. Board of Trustees for Southern Illinois
University

Guthrie v. Board of Trustees for Southern Illinois University · No. 3:23-cv-02989 · Decided March 31, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois considers the defendant's motion for summary judgment in Shannon Guthrie's Title VII gender-discrimination failure-to-hire action. Guthrie alleges that Southern Illinois University selected a male baseball assistant coach who lacked softball experience instead of hiring her as head softball coach. The court finds genuine disputes of material fact concerning the hiring process, the defendant's stated reasons, and possible pretext, and denies summary judgment.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Gilbert C. Sison
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois
DECIDED	March 31, 2026
DOCKET	3:23-cv-02989
DISPOSITION	denied
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Motion for summary judgment
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment standard under Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c)
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	non_precedential

TOPICS

- employment discrimination
- title vii
- summary judgment
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- employment law
- civil rights
- civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff established a prima facie case of gender discrimination under Title VII
2. Whether Defendant articulated a legitimate, non-discriminatory reason for not hiring Plaintiff
3. Whether Plaintiff produced sufficient evidence of pretext to survive summary judgment

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff established a prima facie case because she was a member of a protected class, applied for and was qualified for the position, was rejected, and the University hired someone outside the protected class who was less qualified.
2. Defendant's stated reason—prioritizing 'culture change' and Plaintiff's lack of 'soft skills'—was legitimate on its face.
3. Plaintiff produced sufficient evidence of pretext, including timing of Hall's communications with Finigan suggesting preselection, disparity in qualifications, deviation from normal hiring practices, and Hall's subjective 'gut feeling' rationale.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The singular question that matters in discrimination case is whether the evidence would permit a reasonable factfinder to conclude that the plaintiff's race, ethnicity, sex, religion, or other proscribed factor caused the discharge or other adverse employment action.”

“Pretext means a lie, specifically a phony reason for some action.”

“I didn't get a sense of empathy, connectedness, vulnerability, what are many times classified as the soft skills.”

“Based on this record and when read in the light most favorable to the Plaintiff, a reasonable jury could find that Defendant's explanation for not hiring Plaintiff is in fact false, and it could readily infer that Defendant discriminated against Plaintiff because of her gender when it did not hire her for the head softball coach position.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff Shannon Guthrie, a highly qualified female softball coach, applied for the Head Softball Coach position at Southern Illinois University. The University formed a search committee and interviewed finalists, including Plaintiff. Despite Plaintiff's extensive qualifications and positive feedback from some committee members, Athletic Director Tim Hall rejected her based on a 'gut feeling' that she lacked soft skills. Instead, Hall hired P.J. Finigan, a male assistant baseball coach with no softball experience, as interim coach. Finigan did not apply for the position and did not meet the posted minimum qualifications.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed amended complaint for gender discrimination under Title VII. Defendant moved for summary judgment.

DISPOSITION

denied

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The Court directed the Clerk to set a telephone status conference to discuss potential trial dates and suggested parties contact chambers for a settlement conference if beneficial.

CASES CITED

- National American Ins. Co. v. Artisan and Truckers Cas. Co., 796 F.3d 717 (7th Cir. 2015)
- Gupta v. Melloh, 19 F.4th 990 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242 (1986)
- Quinn v. Wexford Health Sources, Inc., 8 F.4th 557 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986)
- Fletcher v. Doig, 145 F.4th 756 (7th Cir. 2025)
- Bishop v. Air Line Pilots Association International, 5 F.4th 684 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Lewis v. City of Chicago, 496 F.3d 645 (7th Cir. 2007)
- Knight v. Wiseman, 590 F.3d 458 (7th Cir. 2009)
- Abrego v. Wilkie, 907 F.3d 1004 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Smith v. City of Janesville, 40 F.4th 816 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Doxtator v. O'Brien, 39 F.4th 852 (7th Cir. 2022)
- DiPerna v. Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 893 F.3d 1001 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Burton v. Kohn L. Firm, S.C., 934 F.3d 572 (7th Cir. 2019)
- D.Z. v. Buell, 796 F.3d 749 (7th Cir. 2015)
- Waldrige v. American Hoechst Corp., 24 F.3d 918 (7th Cir. 1994)
- Little v. Cox's Supermarkets, 71 F.3d 637 (7th Cir. 1995)
- Johnson v. Advocate Health & Hospitals Corporation, 892 F.3d 887 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Ortiz v. Werner Enters., Inc., 834 F.3d 760 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Gamble v. County of Cook, 106 F.4th 622 (7th Cir. 2024)
- McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792 (1973)
- Lesiv v. Illinois Central Railroad Company, 39 F.4th 903 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Chatman v. Board of Education of City of Chicago, 5 F.4th 738 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Owens v. Old Wisconsin Sausage Company, Inc., 870 F.3d 662 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Lloyd v. Mayor of City of Peru, No. 18-2410, 761 Fed. Appx. 608 (7th Cir. Mar. 4, 2019)
- Igasaki v. Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, 988 F.3d 948 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Johnson v. General Board of Pension & Health Benefits of United Methodist Church, 733 F.3d 722 (7th Cir. 2013)
- Skiba v. Illinois Central Railroad Company, 884 F.3d 708 (7th Cir. 2018)

- *Scruggs v. Garst Seed Co.*, 587 F.3d 832 (7th Cir. 2009)
- *Russell v. Acme-Evans Co.*, 51 F.3d 64 (7th Cir. 1995)
- *Millbrook v. IBP, Inc.*, 280 F.3d 1169 (7th Cir. 2002)
- *Hitchcock v. Angel Corps, Inc.*, 718 F.3d 733 (7th Cir. 2013)
- *Shures v. Ameren Illinois Company*, No. 23-2761, 2024 WL 1756338 (7th Cir. April 24, 2024)
- *Petts v. Rockledge Furniture LLC*, 534 F.3d 715 (7th Cir. 2008)
- *Bragg v. Munster Medical Research Foundation Inc.*, 58 F.4th 265 (7th Cir. 2023)
- *Crain v. McDonough*, 63 F.4th 585 (7th Cir. 2023)
- *Burton v. Board of Regents of University of Wisconsin System*, 851 F.3d 690 (7th Cir. 2017)

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