

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND

Chinette Y. Pinkney v. Prince George’s County, MD

Pinkney · No. 8:24-cv-00849-PX · Decided March 9, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Maryland grants Prince George’s County’s motion for summary judgment in Chinette Y. Pinkney’s Title VII race-retaliation case. The court concludes that Pinkney did not present evidence that the relevant hiring decisionmakers knew of her protected activity when they selected another candidate for a Fire Inspector position. The court alternatively holds that Pinkney offered no evidence that the County’s stated reason for selecting the other candidate was pretextual.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Maryland
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Paula Xinis
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Maryland
DECIDED	March 9, 2026
DOCKET	8:24-cv-00849-PX
DISPOSITION	granted
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved for summary judgment on Plaintiff’s Title VII race-retaliation claim after discovery. The district court granted the motion without a hearing.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is proper when, viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, there is no genuine dispute of material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court may not weigh evidence or make credibility determinations, but need not credit mere speculation or assertions blatantly contradicted by the record.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court memorandum opinion
PARTIES	Chinette Y. Pinkney v. Prince George’s County, MD

TOPICS

- retaliation
- title vii
- racial discrimination
- summary judgment
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Pinkney presented sufficient evidence that the County's failure to select her for the Fire Inspector 3H position was causally connected to protected Title VII activity.
2. Whether Pinkney presented sufficient evidence that the County's stated legitimate reason for selecting Smith was a pretext for retaliation.
3. Whether the County was entitled to summary judgment on Pinkney's Title VII race-retaliation claim.

HOLDINGS

1. A plaintiff cannot establish a causal connection between protected activity and an adverse employment action without evidence that the relevant employer decisionmakers knew of the protected activity before taking the action. Temporal proximity alone is insufficient when employer knowledge is not shown.
2. Pinkney's testimony that she told the EEO officer she believed the harassment was because she was Black created a genuine factual dispute as to whether she complained of race-based discrimination and engaged in protected Title VII activity.
3. Even assuming Pinkney could establish a prima facie retaliation case, she was not entitled to proceed because she produced no evidence that the County's stated reason for selecting Smith—his extensive prior service and experience as a Battalion Chief—was pretextual.
4. The County was entitled to summary judgment on Pinkney's sole Title VII race-retaliation claim.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Summary judgment must be granted "against a party who fails to make a showing sufficient to establish the existence of an element essential to that party's case, and on which that party will bear the burden of proof at trial."" (Analysis, § II)

"The Court cannot weigh evidence or make credibility determinations. Anderson, 477 U.S. at 255 ("Credibility determinations, the weighing of the evidence, and the drawing of legitimate inferences from the facts are jury functions, not those of a judge, whether he is ruling on a motion for summary judgment or for a directed verdict.")." (Analysis, § II)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Pinkney, a Black employee who had worked for the Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department since 2000, filed an informal EEO complaint in November 2021 alleging harassment and bullying and testified that she told the EEO investigator she believed the conduct was because she was Black. Around the same time, she applied for a civilian Fire Inspector 3H position. Human Resources Manager Yolanda Smedley selected Mark Smith, a former Battalion Chief with approximately 25 years of prior sworn service, as the most qualified candidate, and Chief Tiffany Green offered him the position on November 24, 2021. The record did not establish that any

decisionmaker knew of Pinkney's protected activity when the selection was made, and Pinkney offered no evidence that the County's stated qualifications-based reason was pretextual.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Pinkney exhausted administrative remedies and filed suit on March 21, 2024, alleging that Prince George's County failed to select her for a Fire Inspector 3H position in retaliation for filing an EEO complaint. After discovery closed, the County moved for summary judgment. The district court concluded that Pinkney could not establish the knowledge necessary for causation and, alternatively, could not show that the County's legitimate reason for selecting another candidate was pretextual.

DISPOSITION

granted

CASES CITED

- The News & Observer Publishing Co. v. Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority, 597 F.3d 570, 573 (4th Cir. 2010)
- Paulone v. City of Frederick, 787 F. Supp. 2d 360, 364 n.3 (D. Md. 2011)
- In re Family Dollar FLSA Litigation, 637 F.3d 508, 512 (4th Cir. 2011)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 322–23 (1986)
- Venugopal v. Shire Laboratories, 334 F. Supp. 2d 835, 840 (D. Md. 2004)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, 477 U.S. 242, 252, 255 (1986)
- Othentec Ltd. v. Phelan, 526 F.3d 135, 140 (4th Cir. 2008)
- Beale v. Hardy, 769 F.2d 213, 214 (4th Cir. 1985)
- Scott v. Harris, 550 U.S. 372, 380 (2007)
- Perkins v. International Paper Co., 936 F.3d 196, 213 (4th Cir. 2019)
- Barbour v. Garland, 105 F.4th 579, 589–90 (4th Cir. 2024)
- Foster v. University of Maryland-Eastern Shore, 787 F.3d 243, 250 (4th Cir. 2015)
- Vedula v. Azar, No. TDC-18-0386, 2020 WL 5500279, at *13 (D. Md. Sept. 11, 2020)
- Strothers v. City of Laurel, Maryland, 895 F.3d 317, 336 (4th Cir. 2018)
- Dowe v. Total Action Against Poverty in Roanoke Valley, 145 F.3d 653, 657 (4th Cir. 1998)
- Hooven-Lewis v. Caldera, 249 F.3d 259, 273 (4th Cir. 2001)
- Baqir v. Principi, 434 F.3d 733, 748 (4th Cir. 2006)
- Gatebe v. Nelson, No. 22-2127, 2024 WL 937079, at *3 (4th Cir. Mar. 5, 2024)
- Evans v. Technologies Applications & Service Co., 80 F.3d 954, 960 (4th Cir. 1996)
- Wileman v. Frank, 979 F.2d 30, 38 (4th Cir. 1992)