

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
LOUISIANA

Tatonya Johnson v. SE Tylose Louisiana, LLC and SE Tylose USA,
Inc.

Johnson v. SE Tylose · No. 23-1303-SDD-RLB · Decided March 31, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana grants defendants’ motion for summary judgment in an employment-discrimination action brought by Tatonya Johnson against SE Tylose Louisiana, LLC and SE Tylose USA, Inc. The claims included race discrimination under Title VII and 42 U.S.C. § 1981, hostile work environment, disparate treatment, retaliation, and FMLA retaliation and interference. The ruling evaluates alleged racially discriminatory conduct, workplace treatment, work-schedule disputes, and the circumstances surrounding Johnson’s termination.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana
DECIDED	March 31, 2026
DOCKET	23-1303-SDD-RLB
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved for summary judgment on Plaintiff's Title VII and 42 U.S.C. § 1981 race-discrimination, hostile-work-environment, and retaliation claims, as well as her Family and Medical Leave Act retaliation and interference claims. The court granted Defendants' motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56(a), summary judgment is appropriate when there is no genuine dispute of material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The evidence and reasonable inferences are viewed in the light most favorable to the nonmovant, but conclusory allegations, unsubstantiated assertions, and a mere scintilla of evidence are insufficient.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Tatonya Johnson v. SE Tylose Louisiana, LLC, SE Tylose USA, Inc.

TOPICS

employment discrimination

title vii

racial discrimination

retaliation

summary judgment

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Johnson presented sufficient evidence of race-based disparate treatment under Title VII and § 1981 concerning remote-work access, compensation, and termination.
2. Whether Johnson presented sufficient evidence that alleged workplace conduct was race-based and sufficiently severe or pervasive to establish a hostile work environment.
3. Whether Johnson engaged in protected Title VII activity and established a causal connection between that activity and alleged retaliatory actions.
4. Whether Johnson presented sufficient evidence to rebut SE Tylose's legitimate, nondiscriminatory reasons for its employment decisions.
5. Whether Johnson's remaining FMLA retaliation and interference claims survived summary judgment.

HOLDINGS

1. Johnson's denial of general remote-work access and two requests to work from home did not constitute an actionable adverse employment action on the evidence presented; the alleged harm was de minimis and did not show a disadvantageous change in a term, condition, or privilege of employment.
2. Johnson failed to establish a prima facie case of race discrimination based on her 2020 pay increase and failed to show that SE Tylose's stated reasons for the lower increase were pretextual.
3. Johnson failed to establish a prima facie case of race discrimination in her termination because she identified no similarly situated comparator with a similar work history who was treated more favorably. In any event, she failed to show that SE Tylose's performance, attendance, schedule, phone-use, and professionalism reasons were pretextual.
4. Johnson failed to establish that the alleged harassment was based on race or was sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of employment and create an abusive working environment.
5. Johnson failed to establish a Title VII retaliation claim because the alleged PIP, remote-work changes, and department-wide audit were not actionable adverse employment actions, and she did not show that she engaged in protected activity or that protected activity caused her termination.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“the only issue is whether SET’s decisions were racially motivated.” (II.B)

“Title VII does not require an employer to make proper decisions, only non-discriminatory ones.” (II.B.3)

“Title VII is not a ‘general civility code.’” (II.C)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Johnson, a Black customer-service representative at SE Tylose's Plaquemine, Louisiana plant, alleged that her Japanese supervisor, Hiroshi Jomori, treated her less favorably than two white coworkers, made offensive comments, and subjected her to hostile treatment. In 2022, after Brad Smothers became her supervisor, SE Tylose ended its general hybrid-work policy and required employees to work in the office; the company documented complaints about Johnson's availability, work output, missed deadlines, resistance to the schedule, and interactions with management. Johnson was terminated in August 2022 after Smothers recommended termination for performance, schedule resistance, alleged phone misuse, and unprofessional conduct. The court found that Johnson lacked sufficient evidence connecting the challenged actions to race or protected Title VII activity and failed to rebut SE Tylose's legitimate reasons for termination.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Johnson filed suit alleging race discrimination, hostile work environment, and retaliation under Title VII and 42 U.S.C. § 1981, together with FMLA retaliation and interference claims. The court previously dismissed her Title VII Discrimination in Pay Act theory for failure to exhaust administrative remedies, while leaving the § 1981 pay claim available. After discovery, Defendants moved for summary judgment. The court granted the motion on all remaining claims.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Hamilton v. Dallas County, 79 F.4th 494 (5th Cir. 2023) (en banc)
- Muldrow v. City of St. Louis, 601 U.S. 346 (2024)
- Lee v. Kansas City Southern Railway Co., 574 F.3d 253 (5th Cir. 2009)
- St. Mary's Honor Center v. Hicks, 509 U.S. 502 (1993)
- Reeves v. Sanderson Plumbing Products, Inc., 530 U.S. 133 (2000)
- Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc., 510 U.S. 17 (1993)
- Faragher v. City of Boca Raton, 524 U.S. 775 (1998)
- Hernandez v. Yellow Transportation, Inc., 670 F.3d 644 (5th Cir. 2012)
- McCoy v. City of Shreveport, 492 F.3d 551 (5th Cir. 2007)
- Davis v. Dallas Independent School District, 448 F. App'x 485 (5th Cir. 2011)
- Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railway Co. v. White, 548 U.S. 53 (2006)
- Owens v. Circassia Pharmaceuticals, Inc., 33 F.4th 814 (5th Cir. 2022)
- Cutrera v. Board of Supervisors, 429 F.3d 108 (5th Cir. 2005)
- Seaman v. CSPH, Inc., 179 F.3d 297 (5th Cir. 1999)
- Jones v. Gulf Coast Restaurant Group, Inc., 8 F.4th 363 (5th Cir. 2021)

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