

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
ILLINOIS, EASTERN DIVISION

Keith Coleman v. Soo Line Railroad Co. d/b/a Canadian Pacific
Railway

Coleman · No. 22-cv-00016 · Decided February 12, 2026

SUMMARY

In this employment-discrimination action, Keith Coleman, an African American locomotive engineer, alleged that Soo Line Railroad terminated him because of his race, retaliated against protected activity, discriminated based on age and disability, and failed to provide a reasonable accommodation. The United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois granted the railroad’s motion for summary judgment, including on the race-discrimination claims and the unopposed age-discrimination claim. The opinion analyzes the McDonnell Douglas framework, the holistic approach required by Ortiz v. Werner Enterprises, and the elements of Title VII retaliation.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	John Robert Blakey
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
DECIDED	February 12, 2026
DOCKET	22-cv-00016
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved for summary judgment on Plaintiff's race discrimination, retaliation, age discrimination, and disability discrimination/reasonable accommodation claims. The court granted the motion in full and directed entry of judgment for Defendant.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is proper when there is no genuine dispute of material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court viewed facts and reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, while requiring the nonmoving party to identify evidence supporting a triable issue.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court memorandum opinion; persuasive authority only
PARTIES	Keith Coleman v. Soo Line Railroad Co. d/b/a Canadian Pacific Railway

TOPICS

employment discrimination

title vii

retaliation

ada discrimination

summary judgment

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

disability discrimination

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Coleman produced sufficient evidence to create a genuine dispute that CP terminated him because of his race.
2. Whether Coleman produced evidence that his protected activity was a but-for cause of his adverse employment actions, including whether his email to CP's CEO constituted protected activity.
3. Whether CP failed to reasonably accommodate Coleman's sleep apnea, diabetes, or high blood pressure by failing to ensure that he could access his CPAP machine or avoid an overnight route.
4. Whether Defendant was entitled to summary judgment on Coleman's unopposed age discrimination claim.

HOLDINGS

1. Coleman failed to establish a prima facie case of race discrimination because he did not produce evidence that he was meeting CP's legitimate expectations or identify a similarly situated employee who received more favorable treatment. Independently, considering the evidence holistically under Ortiz, the record did not permit a reasonable factfinder to conclude that race caused either termination.
2. Coleman failed to establish retaliation because he offered no evidence that any protected activity was a but-for cause of his adverse employment actions. His email to CP's CEO was not protected activity because it did not complain of discrimination connected to a protected class or provide facts supporting such an inference.
3. Coleman failed to establish that CP violated the ADA's reasonable-accommodation requirement because his accommodation request did not request access to a CPAP machine or accommodation from overnight routes, and he presented no evidence that CP knew he needed those accommodations.
4. Summary judgment was granted on the age discrimination claim because Coleman did not oppose Defendant's motion.
5. Defendant was entitled to summary judgment on all claims because the record lacked evidence from which a reasonable jury could find for Coleman.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The question on summary judgment remains, “has the non-moving party produced sufficient evidence to support a jury verdict of intentional discrimination?””

“Summary judgment is proper where there is “no dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.””

“The Court thus grants Defendant’s motion for summary judgment [69] and directs the Clerk to enter judgment in favor of Defendant and against Plaintiff on all claims.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Coleman, an African American locomotive engineer, accumulated disciplinary demerits and suspensions before CP terminated him in October 2019 following a break-in-two train incident and alleged operating violations. A public law board later reinstated him without backpay on a last-chance basis, finding that CP acted unreasonably, arbitrarily, and capriciously in terminating him despite sufficient evidence of an operating violation. After returning to work, Coleman disclosed sleep apnea, diabetes, and high blood pressure and submitted an accommodation request concerning doctor visits, but the request did not mention CPAP access or overnight stays. CP terminated him again in July 2021 after an audit appeared to show him sleeping while on duty.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Coleman filed suit on January 3, 2022, alleging race and disability discrimination and retaliation after CP terminated him in 2019, reinstated him on a last-chance basis in 2021, and terminated him again. The EEOC issued a notice of right to sue on October 8, 2021. CP moved for summary judgment on all claims, and Coleman did not oppose summary judgment on his age discrimination claim.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248, 252 (1986)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323 (1986)
- King v. Hendricks County Commissioners, 954 F.3d 981, 984 (7th Cir. 2020)
- Hutchison v. Fitzgerald Equip. Co., Hutchison v. Fitzgerald Equipment Co., Inc., 910 F.3d 1016, 1021-22 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 586 (1986)
- Barnes v. City of Centralia, 943 F.3d 826, 832 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Lewis v. Indiana Wesleyan University, 36 F.4th 755, 759 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Abrego v. Wilkie, 907 F.3d 1004, 1012 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Ortiz v. Werner Enterprises, Inc., 834 F.3d 760, 765 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Davis v. Board of Trustees of Community College District No. 508, 846 F.3d 216, 224 (7th Cir. 2017)

- Morgan v. SVT, LLC, 724 F.3d 990, 997 (7th Cir. 2013)
- Andrews v. CBOCS West, Inc., 743 F.3d 230, 234 (7th Cir. 2014)
- Peele v. Country Mutual Insurance Co., 288 F.3d 319, 326 (7th Cir. 2002)
- Collier v. Budd Co., 66 F.3d 886, 889 (7th Cir. 1995)
- Curry v. Menard, Inc., 270 F.3d 473, 477-78 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Flores v. Preferred Technical Group, 182 F.3d 512, 515 (7th Cir. 1999)
- Oest v. Illinois Department of Corrections, 240 F.3d 605, 612 n.3 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Braun v. Village of Palatine, 56 F.4th 542, 553 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Alioto v. Town of Lisbon, 651 F.3d 715, 720 (7th Cir. 2011)
- Lekas v. Briley, 405 F.3d 602, 614 (7th Cir. 2005)
- United States v. Useni, 516 F.3d 634, 658 (7th Cir. 2008)
- Sanchez v. Miller, 792 F.2d 694, 703 (7th Cir. 1986)
- Hnin v. TOA (USA), LLC, 751 F.3d 499, 504 (7th Cir. 2014)
- Alexander v. Casino Queen, Inc., 739 F.3d 972, 981 (7th Cir. 2014)
- Barricks v. Eli Lilly and Co., 481 F.3d 556, 560 (7th Cir. 2007)
- Coleman v. Donahoe, 667 F.3d 835, 847 (7th Cir. 2012)
- Estate of Freese-Pettibon ex rel. O'Mealy v. Nexus RVs, LLC, 701 F. Supp. 3d 757, 766 n.10 (N.D. Ind. 2023)
- Litsinger v. Forest River, Inc., 536 F. Supp. 3d 334, 353 (N.D. Ind. 2021)
- Kramer v. Banc of America Securities, LLC, 355 F.3d 961, 964 n.1 (7th Cir. 2004)
- Ritchie v. Glidden Co., 242 F.3d 713, 723 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Brown v. CACH, LLC, 94 F.4th 665, 667 (7th Cir. 2024)
- Schacht v. Wisconsin Department of Corrections, 175 F.3d 497, 504 (7th Cir. 1999)
- Skiba v. Illinois Central Railroad Co., 884 F.3d 708, 725 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Porter v. City of Chicago, 700 F.3d 944, 957 (7th Cir. 2012)
- Benuzzi v. Board of Education of City of Chicago, 647 F.3d 652, 664 (7th Cir. 2011)
- Tomanovich v. City of Indianapolis, 457 F.3d 656, 663 (7th Cir. 2006)
- University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center v. Nassar, 570 U.S. 338, 362 (2013)
- Bunn v. Khoury Enterprises, 753 F.3d 676, 682 (7th Cir. 2014)
- EEOC v. Sears, Roebuck & Co., 417 F.3d 789, 797 (7th Cir. 2005)