

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
MISSOURI, WESTERN DIVISION

Roderick Sly v. Douglas Collins, Secretary, United States Department
of Veterans Affairs

Sly v. Collins, No. 4:24-CV-00448-DGK (W.D. Mo. Mar. 19, 2026) · No. No. 4:24-CV-00448-DGK · Decided
March 19, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri grants the Secretary of Veterans Affairs’ motion for summary judgment in Roderick Sly’s employment discrimination action. The court holds that Sly failed to provide sufficient evidence of pretext for his discrimination and retaliation claims and failed to establish a sufficiently severe or pervasive hostile work environment. The claims arose from Sly’s demotion from Housekeeping Aid Supervisor to Housekeeping Aid at the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri, Western Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Greg Kays
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri, Western Division
DECIDED	March 19, 2026
DOCKET	No. 4:24-CV-00448-DGK
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought claims for employment discrimination, hostile work environment, and retaliation. Defendant moved for summary judgment on all claims, and the court granted the motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is appropriate when, viewing the facts and reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, there is no genuine dispute of material fact and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The nonmoving party must support allegations with sufficient probative evidence and may not rely on speculation, conjecture, or conclusory assertions.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Roderick Sly v. Douglas Collins, Secretary, United States Department of Veterans Affairs

TOPICS

employment discrimination

title vii

retaliation

hostile work environment

summary judgment

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

federal employment law

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Defendant was entitled to summary judgment on Sly's Title VII discrimination claims based on race, disability, sex, color, age, and protected activity.
2. Whether Defendant was entitled to summary judgment on Sly's retaliation claim under Title VII.
3. Whether Sly presented sufficient evidence of discriminatory or retaliatory harassment to establish a hostile work environment claim.
4. Whether Sly could rely on alleged adverse actions beyond the demotion when those actions were not administratively exhausted.

HOLDINGS

1. Defendant was entitled to summary judgment because, even assuming Sly established a prima facie case, he failed to produce evidence that Defendant's legitimate, nondiscriminatory performance-based reasons for the demotion were pretextual.
2. Defendant was entitled to summary judgment on the retaliation claim because Sly failed to establish a prima facie causal connection between protected activity and his demotion and failed to show pretext.
3. Defendant was entitled to summary judgment because Sly failed to provide evidence that the alleged harassment was caused by a protected characteristic or protected activity and failed to show conduct sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of employment.
4. The court limited its consideration to the exhausted demotion-related claims and did not consider other alleged adverse actions, including failure to accommodate, shift or schedule changes, and incidents involving staff medical emergencies.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The evidence must do more than raise doubts about the wisdom and fairness of the employer’s opinions and actions—it must create a real issue as to the genuineness of the employer’s perceptions and beliefs.”

“Title VII does not impose a general civility code for the American workplace.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Roderick Sly, a disabled, sixty-year-old Black African-American man, was promoted from Housekeeping Aid to Housekeeping Aid Supervisor at the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center on July 17, 2022, subject to a one-year supervisory probationary period. Before and around the time of his promotion, he made workplace complaints, including a hostile-work-environment complaint and allegations of sexual harassment. During the probationary period, Sly received written counseling for failing to complete assigned supervisory tasks, and he was later demoted based on multiple asserted performance deficiencies. The court found that Sly presented no sufficient evidence connecting the demotion or alleged workplace conduct to discrimination or protected activity and concluded that his harassment evidence was speculative, conclusory, and insufficiently severe or pervasive.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Sly alleged that the Department of Veterans Affairs discriminated against him and retaliated against him in connection with his demotion from Housekeeping Aid Supervisor to Housekeeping Aid at the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center. After considering the parties' summary-judgment submissions and limiting the material facts under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56 and local rules, the court granted Defendant's motion on all claims.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 322–23 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986)
- Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 588–89 (1986)
- Sherman v. Collins, 158 F.4th 904, 907–10 (8th Cir. 2025)
- Woods v. Collins, 150 F.4th 967, 973 (8th Cir. 2025)
- Martinez-Medina v. Rollins, 144 F.4th 1091, 1096 (8th Cir. 2025)
- Parker v. U.S. Department of Agriculture, 129 F.4th 1104, 1112–14 (8th Cir. 2025)
- Hill v. McDonough, No. 23-1797, 2024 WL 2890977 (8th Cir. June 10, 2024)
- Watson v. McDonough, 996 F.3d 850 (8th Cir. 2021)
- McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792, 802–03 (1973)
- Heisler v. Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co., 931 F.3d 786, 794 (8th Cir. 2019)
- Mahler v. First Dakota Title Limited Partnership, 931 F.3d 799, 805, 807 (8th Cir. 2019)
- Ryan v. Capital Contractors, Inc., 679 F.3d 772, 777 (8th Cir. 2012)
- Cody v. Prairie Ethanol, LLC, 763 F.3d 992, 996 (8th Cir. 2014)
- Williams v. United Parcel Service, Inc., 963 F.3d 803, 809 (8th Cir. 2020)
- Torgerson v. City of Rochester, 643 F.3d 1031, 1047 (8th Cir. 2011) (en banc)
- Arnold v. Nursing & Rehabilitation Center at Good Shepherd, LLC, 471 F.3d 843, 847 (8th Cir. 2006)
- Collins v. Kansas City Missouri Public School District, 92 F.4th 770, 772 (8th Cir. 2024)

- Edmund v. MidAmerican Energy Co., 299 F.3d 679, 685–86 (8th Cir. 2002)
- Warren v. Nucor Corp., 150 F.4th 990, 998 (8th Cir. 2025)
- Hervey v. County of Koochiching, 527 F.3d 711, 722–23 (8th Cir. 2008)
- Nitsche v. CEO of Osage Valley Electric Cooperative, 446 F.3d 841, 846 (8th Cir. 2006)
- Stewart v. Independent School District No. 196, 481 F.3d 1034, 1042 (8th Cir. 2007)
- Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railway Co. v. White, 548 U.S. 53 (2006)
- Blomker v. Jewell, 831 F.3d 1051, 1056 (8th Cir. 2016)
- Carpenter v. Con-Way Central Express, Inc., 481 F.3d 611, 618 (8th Cir. 2007)
- Palesch v. Missouri Commission on Human Rights, 233 F.3d 560, 567, 570 (8th Cir. 2000)
- Dorsey v. Pinnacle Automation Co., 278 F.3d 830, 838 (8th Cir. 2002)
- Lindeman v. Saint Luke's Hospital of Kansas City, Lindeman v. Saint Luke's Hospital of Kansas City, 899 F.3d 603, 608 (8th Cir. 2018)