

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

James E. Ritter v. Schindler Elevator Corp., et al.

Ritter v. Schindler Elevator Corp., No. 1:23-cv-00498 (N.D. Ohio Apr. 24, 2026) · No. 1:23-cv-00498 · Decided
April 24, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio grants Schindler Elevator Corporation's motion for summary judgment in James E. Ritter's claims under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Ohio Fair Employment Practices Act, and related retaliation provisions. The court concludes that Ritter failed to present sufficient direct or circumstantial evidence that age or protected activity was the but-for cause of the company's hiring decisions or his termination in a reduction in force.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, Eastern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	David A. Ruiz
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, Eastern Division
DECIDED	April 24, 2026
DOCKET	1:23-cv-00498
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved for summary judgment on plaintiff's claims under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Ohio Fair Employment Practices Act, and related retaliation provisions. The district court granted the motion and dismissed the case.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is appropriate when the movant shows that there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and that the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The evidence is viewed in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, but the nonmoving party must identify specific facts showing a genuine issue for trial.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion

PARTIES

James E. Ritter v. Schindler Elevator Corp., et al.

TOPICS

age discrimination

retaliation

summary judgment

employment discrimination

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Ritter presented direct or circumstantial evidence sufficient to create a genuine issue of fact on his ADEA and Ohio age-discrimination claims concerning the denial of Territory Vice-President positions.
2. Whether Ritter established a prima facie age-discrimination case concerning the elimination of his position in a reduction in force.
3. Whether Schindler's stated reasons for not selecting Ritter for Territory Vice-President positions and eliminating his position were pretextual.
4. Whether Ritter engaged in protected activity under the ADEA or Ohio law by responding to retirement-related questions and stating that he was disheartened not to fit into the company's next generation of leaders.
5. Whether Ritter established the required but-for causal connection between any protected activity and an adverse employment action.

HOLDINGS

1. Ritter's evidence that a supervisor asked about his retirement plans and that Ritter referred to not fitting into the company's next generation of leaders did not constitute direct evidence of age discrimination because the statements were ambiguous, isolated, or required an inference of age-based animus.
2. Ritter established a prima facie case for his claims concerning several Territory Vice-President positions, but he failed to show that Schindler's legitimate, nondiscriminatory explanations were pretextual.
3. Ritter failed to establish a prima facie case or otherwise create a triable issue that the reduction in force was motivated by age discrimination.
4. Ritter's retirement-related responses and statement that he was disheartened not to fit into the next generation of leaders were not protected opposition to age discrimination, and he failed in any event to establish but-for causation.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"This was known to him and conveyed to him in September 2021, when he was told he would not be considered for another TVP position and counseled on other career opportunities within the company."

(Conclusion)

“And that answer—based on the law and facts construed most favorably for him—is, No.” (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Schindler employed Ritter for approximately twenty-three years, including in several management positions and as a floating Territory Vice-President. After a business-transformation project known as Optimus failed, company leaders told Ritter that his reputation had suffered and that he would not be considered for another permanent Territory Vice-President position. Schindler later eliminated Ritter's floating Territory Vice-President position in an October 2022 reduction in force. Ritter claimed that younger employees were selected for positions he sought, that his termination was because of his age, and that Schindler retaliated against him after he complained about not fitting into the company's "next generation" of leadership.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Ritter's employment was terminated in a reduction in force on October 15, 2022. He filed discrimination charges and then brought this federal action against Schindler Elevator Corporation. After discovery and briefing, the court considered Schindler's motion for summary judgment and concluded that Ritter had not shown a genuine dispute of material fact on his age-discrimination or retaliation claims.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986)
- Peffer v. Stephens, 880 F.3d 256, 262 (6th Cir. 2018)
- Moldowan v. City of Warren, 578 F.3d 351, 374 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Mauzy v. Kelly Services, Inc., 75 Ohio St. 3d 578, 582 (1996)
- Coryell v. Bank One Trust Co. N.A., 101 Ohio St. 3d 175, 179 (2004)
- Wexler v. White's Fine Furniture, Inc., 317 F.3d 564, 570, 576 (6th Cir. 2003) (en banc)
- Amini v. Oberlin College, 440 F.3d 350, 359 (6th Cir. 2006)
- Nguyen v. City of Cleveland, 229 F.3d 559, 563 (6th Cir. 2000)
- Gohl v. Livonia Public School District, 836 F.3d 672, 683 (6th Cir. 2016)
- Scott v. Potter, 182 F. App'x 521, 524, 526 (6th Cir. 2006)
- Peters v. Lincoln Electric Co., 285 F.3d 456, 478 (6th Cir. 2002)
- Cooley v. Carmike Cinemas, Inc., 25 F.3d 1325, 1330 (6th Cir. 1994)
- Ercegovich v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., 154 F.3d 344, 354 (6th Cir. 1998)
- Rowan v. Lockheed Martin Energy Systems, Inc., 360 F.3d 544, 548-50 (6th Cir. 2004)
- Sharp v. Aker Plant Services Group, Inc., 726 F.3d 789, 794, 798-99 (6th Cir. 2013)
- Morgan v. New York Life Insurance Co., 559 F.3d 425, 432-33 (6th Cir. 2009)

- McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792 (1973)
- Allen v. Highlands Hospital Corp., 545 F.3d 387, 394 (6th Cir. 2008)
- Minadeo v. ICI Paints, 398 F.3d 751, 764 (6th Cir. 2005)
- Kohmescher v. Kroger Co., 61 Ohio St. 3d 501 (1991)
- Blizzard v. Marion Technical College, 698 F.3d 275, 283, 287 (6th Cir. 2012)
- Ridenour v. Lawson Co., 791 F.2d 52, 57 (6th Cir. 1986)
- Barnes v. GenCorp Inc., Barnes v. GenCorp Inc., 896 F.2d 1457, 1465-67, 1469 (6th Cir. 1990)
- Wilson v. Firestone Tire & Rubber Co., 932 F.2d 510, 514, 517 (6th Cir. 1991)
- Geiger v. Tower Automotive, 579 F.3d 614, 622-23 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Wilson v. State of Ohio, Department of Job & Family Services, 178 F. App'x 457, 465 (6th Cir. 2006)
- Campbell v. PMI Food Equipment Group, Inc., 509 F.3d 776, 785-86 (6th Cir. 2007)
- Thompson v. Fresh Products, LLC, 985 F.3d 509, 526-27 (6th Cir. 2021)
- Simpson v. Midland-Ross Corp., 823 F.2d 937, 943-44 (6th Cir. 1987)
- Provenzano v. LCI Holdings, Inc., 663 F.3d 806, 814-15 (6th Cir. 2011)
- Texas Department of Community Affairs v. Burdine, 450 U.S. 248, 254, 256, 259 (1981)
- Dews v. A.B. Dick Co., 231 F.3d 1016, 1021 (6th Cir. 2000)
- Johnson v. Kroger Co., 319 F.3d 858, 866 (6th Cir. 2003)
- University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center v. Nassar, 570 U.S. 338, 339 (2013)
- Greer-Burger v. Temesi, 116 Ohio St. 3d 324 (2007)
- Canitia v. Yellow Freight System, Inc., 903 F.2d 1064, 1066 (6th Cir. 1990)
- Coch v. Gem Industries, No. L-04-1357, 2005 WL 1414454, at *5 (Ohio Ct. App. June 17, 2005)
- Fox v. Eagle Distributing Co., 510 F.3d 587, 591 (6th Cir. 2007)
- Willoughby v. Allstate Insurance Co., 104 F. App'x 528, 531 (6th Cir. 2004)
- Ladd v. Grand Trunk Western Railroad, Inc., 552 F.3d 495, 502 (6th Cir. 2009)
- United States Postal Service Board of Governors v. Aikens, 460 U.S. 711, 716-17 (1983)