

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF  
INDIANA, SOUTH BEND DIVISION

Starlite Jones v. Zimmer, Inc. d/b/a Zimmer Biomet

Jones · No. 3:24cv255 DRL · Decided December 19, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana grants Zimmer, Inc.’s motion for summary judgment in Starlite Jones’s Title VII action. Jones alleged race discrimination in her termination, a race-based hostile work environment, and retaliation. The court concludes that she failed to establish pretext, employer negligence in addressing alleged coworker harassment, or other evidence sufficient to support her claims.

CASE DETAILS

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| COURT                 | United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| WRITING FOR THE COURT | Damon R. Leichty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| JURISDICTION          | United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| DECIDED               | December 19, 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| DOCKET                | 3:24cv255 DRL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| DISPOSITION           | other                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PROCEDURAL POSTURE    | Plaintiff brought Title VII claims for race discrimination in termination, race-based hostile work environment, and retaliation. Defendant moved for summary judgment, which the court granted on all claims.                                                                                                                                                                  |
| STANDARD OF REVIEW    | Summary judgment is appropriate when the movant shows that no genuine dispute of material fact exists and that it is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court viewed the facts and reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to Jones, but did not weigh evidence, resolve credibility disputes, or draw inferences based only on speculation or conjecture. |
| PRECEDENTIAL VALUE    | unpublished district court opinion; persuasive rather than binding outside the case                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## PARTIES

Starlite Jones v. Zimmer, Inc. d/b/a Zimmer Biomet

## TOPICS

employment discrimination

title vii

racial discrimination

hostile work environment

retaliation

## PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

civil procedure

## QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Jones presented sufficient evidence for a reasonable factfinder to conclude that Zimmer terminated her because of her race.
2. Whether Zimmer was liable for a race-based hostile work environment allegedly created by Jones's coworker.
3. Whether Jones presented sufficient evidence of a causal connection between her report of racially derogatory text messages and her termination to support a Title VII retaliation claim.

## HOLDINGS

1. Summary judgment was proper on Jones's termination-discrimination claim because, although Jones identified a potentially comparable white coworker, the record did not permit a reasonable jury to find that Zimmer's stated workplace-conduct rationale was a pretext for racial discrimination or that race caused the termination.
2. Summary judgment was proper on the hostile-work-environment claim because Jones did not establish, and did not meaningfully contest, employer liability, and the undisputed record showed that Zimmer reasonably investigated and responded to her complaints.
3. Summary judgment was proper on Jones's retaliation claim because the evidence, consisting principally of temporal proximity, did not permit a reasonable jury to find that her report of the racist text message caused her termination.

## KEY QUOTATIONS

*"Pretext means more than a mistake on the part of the employer; pretext means a lie, specifically a phony reason for some action."* (Discussion A)

*"A prompt investigation is the hallmark of a reasonable corrective action."* (Discussion B)

*"Because no reasonable jury could find a causal connection between Ms. Jones's report of the text message and her termination, the court grants summary judgment for Zimmer on the retaliation claim."* (Discussion C)

## FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Zimmer hired Jones in August 2022 as a sales support operator, and she was the only Black employee in her work area. During her employment, Jones reported conflicts and workplace incidents involving coworker Lena

Tabb, including disputes over shared workstations, a chair, a fan, allegedly missing tools, a racial comment, and racially derogatory text messages from an unknown sender. After a March 2023 altercation involving Jones and Tabb, Zimmer investigated, concluded that Jones had been the more aggressive participant and had violated its workplace-conduct policy, and terminated her on March 14, 2023. Jones presented no evidence identifying the sender of the text messages or showing that Zimmer's stated reason for terminating her was a pretext for racial discrimination or retaliation.

## PROCEDURAL HISTORY

After her termination, Jones filed a charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and then filed this action. Zimmer moved for summary judgment. The district court granted the motion, directed entry of judgment for Zimmer, vacated the scheduled trial and final pretrial conference, and terminated the case.

## DISPOSITION

other

## CASES CITED

- Lauth v. Covance, Inc., 863 F.3d 708, 710, 716-17 (7th Cir. 2017)
- 1st Source Bank v. Vill. of Stevensville, 947 F. Supp. 2d 934, 937 (N.D. Ind. 2013)
- Cady v. Sheahan, 467 F.3d 1057, 1060 (7th Cir. 2006)
- Smith v. Lamz, 321 F.3d 680, 683 (7th Cir. 2003)
- Beardsall v. CVS Pharm., Inc., 953 F.3d 969, 972 (7th Cir. 2020)
- Bellaver v. Quanax Corp./Nichols-Homeshield, 200 F.3d 485, 491-92 (7th Cir. 2000)
- Payne v. Pauley, 337 F.3d 767, 770 (7th Cir. 2003)
- Joll v. Valparaiso Cmty. Schs., 953 F.3d 923, 924-25 (7th Cir. 2020)
- Walldridge v. Am. Hoechst Corp., 24 F.3d 918, 920 (7th Cir. 1994)
- Nelson v. Napolitano, 657 F.3d 586, 590 (7th Cir. 2011)
- Luster v. Ill. Dep't of Corr., 652 F.3d 726, 731 (7th Cir. 2011)
- Ames v. Ohio Dep't of Youth Servs., 605 U.S. 303, 308 (2025)
- Scaife v. United States Dep't of Veterans Affs., 49 F.4th 1109, 1115-18 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Galvan v. Indiana, 117 F.4th 935, 939 (7th Cir. 2024)
- Igasaki v. Ill. Dep't of Fin. & Pro. Regul., 988 F.3d 948, 957, 961 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Simpson v. Franciscan All., Inc., 827 F.3d 656, 661 (7th Cir. 2016)
- McDaniel v. Progress Rail Locomotive, Inc., 940 F.3d 360, 368-69 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Perez v. Thorntons, Inc., 731 F.3d 699, 704 (7th Cir. 2013)
- Coleman v. Donahoe, 667 F.3d 835, 846-47, 852 n.5 (7th Cir. 2012)
- Gordon v. United Airlines, Inc., 246 F.3d 878, 891 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Brooks v. Avancez, 39 F.4th 424, 436 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Jones v. Union Pac. R.R. Co., 302 F.3d 735, 744 (7th Cir. 2002)

- Liu v. Cook Cnty., 817 F.3d 307, 318 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Paschall v. Tube Processing Corp., 28 F.4th 805, 813 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Nichols v. Mich. City Plant Planning Dep't, 755 F.3d 594, 600 (7th Cir. 2014)
- Bonte v. U.S. Bank, N.A., 624 F.3d 461, 466 (7th Cir. 2010)
- Saxton v. American Tel. & Tel. Co., 10 F.3d 526, 536 (7th Cir. 1993)
- Burlington N. & Santa Fe Ry. Co. v. White, 548 U.S. 53, 68 (2006)
- Robinson v. Shell Oil Co., 519 U.S. 337, 346 (1997)
- Thompson v. N. Am. Stainless, L.P., 562 U.S. 170, 173-74 (2011)
- Swyear v. Fare Foods Corp., 911 F.3d 874, 885 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Poullard v. McDonald, 829 F.3d 844, 856 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Boss v. Castro, 816 F.3d 910, 918 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Baines v. Walgreen Co., 863 F.3d 656, 661 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Greengrass v. Int'l Monetary Sys. Ltd., 776 F.3d 481, 486 (7th Cir. 2015)
- Magyar v. Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center, 544 F.3d 766, 772 (7th Cir. 2008)
- Boumehdi v. Plastag Holdings, LLC, 489 F.3d 781, 786-87, 793 (7th Cir. 2007)
- Wyninger v. New Venture Gear, Inc., 361 F.3d 965, 981 (7th Cir. 2004)
- Bilow v. Much Shelist Freed Denenberg Ament & Rubenstein, P.C., 277 F.3d 882, 895 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Culver v. Gorman & Co., 416 F.3d 540, 546 (7th Cir. 2005)
- Monroe v. Ind. Dep't of Transp., 871 F.3d 495, 503 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Morgan v. SVT, LLC, 724 F.3d 990, 998 (7th Cir. 2013)