

SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS

Swift v. AutoZone, Inc.

441 Mass. 443 (2004) · Decided April 13, 2004

SUMMARY

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court held that, even before a 2003 statutory amendment, an employer could credit Sunday premium payments toward overtime compensation owed for hours worked over forty in a workweek. The court interpreted G. L. c. 151, § 1A, and G. L. c. 136, § 6 (50), in light of their text and legislative history. It vacated summary judgment for the employees and remanded for judgment in favor of AutoZone.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Marshall, C.J.
JURISDICTION	Massachusetts
DECIDED	April 13, 2004
DISPOSITION	vacated
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The Superior Court allowed the employees' motion for summary judgment and denied AutoZone's cross-motion, then reported a statutory question to the Appeals Court. The Supreme Judicial Court granted direct appellate review.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The statutory question was reviewed de novo. The court independently interpreted the relevant statutes and legislative history.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts; precedential.
PARTIES	Joseph Swift, Edward Cove v. AutoZone, Inc.

TOPICS

- wage and hour
- statutory interpretation
- legislative intent
- appellate procedure
- standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

- employment law
- wage and hour

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether, before the 2003 amendment, G. L. c. 151, § 1A, permitted an employer to credit Sunday premium payments toward overtime compensation for hours worked in excess of forty in the same week.
2. Whether G. L. c. 136, § 6 (50), prohibited an employer from crediting Sunday premium payments toward its overtime obligation under G. L. c. 151, § 1A.
3. Whether the administrative agency's contrary interpretation of G. L. c. 151, § 1A, was entitled to substantial deference.

HOLDINGS

1. Before the 2003 amendment, G. L. c. 151, § 1A, did not prohibit an employer from crediting Sunday premium payments toward overtime compensation owed for work exceeding forty hours in the same workweek.
2. The 2003 amendment expressly permitting crediting was strongly suggestive of the Legislature's original intent to allow the practice and did not establish that crediting had previously been prohibited.
3. No substantial deference was warranted for the agency opinion letter because its interpretation was contrary to the plain language and underlying purpose of the statutes.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“If two statutes require an employer to do the same thing, there is no rule of statutory construction that compels the employer to do so twice.” (447)

“But where the agency’s interpretation is “contrary to plain language of the statute and its underlying purpose,” no deference is warranted.” (450)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

AutoZone employed hourly, nonexempt workers at Massachusetts retail stores. Before April 2001, the company paid employees time-and-a-half for Sunday or holiday work in addition to overtime for hours exceeding forty in a workweek. AutoZone then changed its policy to credit Sunday premium payments toward overtime wages, prompting Joseph Swift and Edward Cove to seek declaratory and injunctive relief, treble damages, and attorney's fees.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hourly, nonexempt AutoZone employees brought a class action challenging the company's policy of crediting Sunday premium payments against overtime compensation. On cross-motions for summary judgment, the Superior Court ruled that neither of the relevant Massachusetts statutes permitted the crediting practice and reported the question for appellate review. The Supreme Judicial Court vacated the judgment for the plaintiffs and remanded for entry of judgment for AutoZone.

DISPOSITION

vacated

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remand to the Superior Court for entry of judgment in favor of AutoZone, Inc.

CASES CITED

- James J. Welch & Co. v. Deputy Comm'r of Capital Planning & Operations, 387 Mass. 662, 666 (1982)
- Valerio v. Putnam Assocs. Inc., 173 F.3d 35, 40 (1st Cir. 1999)
- Bay Ridge Operating Co. v. Aaron, 334 U.S. 446 (1948)
- Fitz-Inn Auto Parks, Inc. v. Commissioner of Labor & Indus., 350 Mass. 39, 42 (1965)
- Massachusetts Hosp. Ass'n v. Department of Med. Sec., 412 Mass. 340, 345-346 (1992)
- Narragansett Food Servs. v. Rhode Island Dep't of Labor, 420 A.2d 805 (R.I. 1980)
- Pullano v. Bluefield, 176 W. Va. 198 (1986)

Retrieved from lawtools.ai · <https://lawtools.ai/cases/state/massachusetts-supreme-judicial-court-of-massachusetts/2004/swift-v-autozone-inc-jfv4gyw0>