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**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF THE TRIAL COURT**

MIDDLESEX, ss.

SUPERIOR COURT

OMAR X. EASY, Ph.D

Plaintiff,

v.

TOWN OF WAYLAND; CHRISTOPHER
RYAN; and ELLEN GRIECO,

Defendants.

C.A. No. 2481 CV 680

FILED
IN THE OFFICE OF THE
CLERK OF COURTS
FOR THE COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX

MAR 13 2024

[Signature]
CLERK

COMPLAINT AND JURY DEMAND

INTRODUCTION

1. Plaintiff Omar X. Easy, Ph.D (“Dr. Easy”) was subjected to a hate crime at work, where the words “OMAR = N****R” were scrawled in white spray paint for all to see. Far from an isolated incident, racist taunts and graffiti dogged Dr. Easy, Wayland’s first Black Superintendent of Schools, as well as his fellow Black employees and students, throughout the entirety of his tenure in Wayland. When Dr. Easy took steps to oppose racism in the workplace, he faced a campaign of retaliation, culminating in the Defendants forcing Dr. Easy from his job and replacing him with a White acting Superintendent.

2. The Defendants openly admitted to unlawfully retaliating against Dr. Easy when they wrote to the Massachusetts Attorney General that Easy was forced from his job as part of the Defendants’ “strategy” for addressing Dr. Easy’s discrimination complaints.

3. Dr. Easy brings this civil action to recover damages for violations of the Massachusetts Fair Employment Practices Act, G.L. c. 151B, § 4, and common law claims.

PARTIES

4. Plaintiff Omar X. Easy, Ph.D (“Dr. Easy”) is a Black male and citizen of Lynnfield, Essex County, Massachusetts.

5. Defendant Town of Wayland (the “Town” or “Wayland”) is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts located in Middlesex County; a duly incorporated municipality that is governed by a Select Board, and an employer within the meaning of G.L. c. 151B, §1. The Town’s population is overwhelmingly White and has only approximately 120 Black residents—less than 1%.

6. The Wayland School Committee (the “School Committee”) is an instrumentality of the Town, pursuant to G.L. c. 71, §37, and an employer within the meaning of G.L. c. 151B, §1. The School Committee is comprised of five members, each serving multi-year terms, on a staggered basis. At all times relevant hereto, all members of the School Committee were White. The School Committee is part of The Town.

7. Wayland Public Schools (the “District”) is an instrumentality of the Town, located in Middlesex County, and an employer within the meaning of G.L. c. 151B, §1. The District is part of The Town.

8. Defendant Christopher Ryan (“Chair Ryan”) is a White citizen of Massachusetts and at all relevant times, was the Chair of the School Committee, residing in Wayland, Middlesex County, Massachusetts.

9. Defendant Ellen Grieco (“Vice Chair Grieco”) is a White citizen of Massachusetts and Vice Chair of the School Committee, residing in Wayland, Middlesex County, Massachusetts.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

10. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendants pursuant to G.L. c. 223A, §§ 2 and 3, because they either maintain a principal place of business in the Commonwealth, are domiciled in the Commonwealth, transact business in the Commonwealth, and/or have an interest in real property in the Commonwealth.

11. The Court has subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to G.L. c. 151B, § 9, and venue is proper in Middlesex County pursuant to G.L. c. 223, § 1.

12. Dr. Easy satisfied his administrative filing requirements as set forth in M.G.L. c. 151B, § 9, regarding all claims pursuant to that statute asserted herein including filing at the MCAD.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL COUNTS

13. Dr. Easy, born in Jamaica, grew up and attended public school in Everett, Massachusetts. In May 2012, Dr. Easy earned his Ph.D in Educational Leadership and Legal Studies from Penn State University. Thereafter he served in senior leadership positions for the Everett Public Schools, including as Vice Principal/Executive Director of the Parent Information Center, and Executive Director of the Academies at Everett.

14. In or about February 2021, the Defendants named Dr. Easy the District's Superintendent, making him the first Black person in Wayland to hold that position. Dr. Easy and the School Committee/District executed an employment agreement on February 25, 2021.

15. Unbeknownst to Dr. Easy at the time he accepted employment, the Defendants — including the School Committee and Chair Ryan and Vice Chair Grieco in particular — fostered a racially hostile work environment so severe and pervasive that it posed a formidable barrier to the full participation of Black employees, including Dr. Easy, in the workplace.

16. Unlawful race discrimination even pervaded Dr. Easy's hiring process. During a meeting of the Superintendent hiring committee, Vice Chair Grieco suggested that Black people cannot be leaders and lacked leadership skills, and asked the consultants organizing the Superintendent search to find additional White candidates after learning that two of the three finalists were Black.

17. Dr. Easy is one of vanishingly few Black employees in Wayland. For example, before being unlawfully forced from his job, Dr. Easy was one of only three Black members of the District's Administrative Council—a group of approximately 20 senior District administrators.

18. Highlighting the severe and pervasive racially hostile work environment in the District, two of those three Black employees on the Administrative Council filed complaints of race discrimination against Wayland, as did a third Black District administrator who left employment not long before Dr. Easy was hired.

19. In numerous ways, large and small, the Defendants—and in particular the School Committee and Chair Ryan and Vice Chair Grieco—fanned the flames of Dr. Easy's racially hostile workplace, which was replete with racist remarks, explicit racist graffiti, racial stereotyping, undermining of authority, abusive and disparate treatment, and unjustified and highly subjective attacks.

20. Rather than taking steps to remedy such unlawful conduct, the Defendants regularly protected the perpetrators of such discrimination and retaliated against those who opposed such unlawful conduct, including Dr. Easy.

21. Use of the horrific term "N****R" and other explicitly racist remarks were common in the District and during Wayland events. For example, in both February 2022 and May 2023, District events, including a basketball game against the Town of Westford, were marred by

racist taunts including the word “N****R,” and in one instance, reduced a Black student to tears.

22. As another example, in or about December 2021 racist graffiti was found inside the District’s middle school, including: “N****R,” “BLACK PEOPLE DIE,” and “ALL BLACK PEOPLE NEED TO LEAVE THE DISTRICT NOW

23. When Dr. Easy opposed such unlawful conduct, the Defendants’ actions and inactions provided tacit approval for the unlawful conduct, and facilitated its persistence.

24. For example, to address the racist graffiti, Dr. Easy recommended cameras be placed in the middle school’s halls—a measure already taken at the high school.

25. In response, White District administrators and employees accused Dr. Easy of “destroying Wayland’s culture” and “bringing Everett culture to Wayland”—a veiled racist reference to Dr. Easy’s majority-minority hometown. The School Committee refused to support Dr. Easy’s initiative to address these incidents and cameras were ultimately not implemented.

26. Defendants consistently turned a blind eye towards unlawful racism, protecting the perpetrators, while frustrating efforts by the victims and their supporters, like Dr. Easy, to remedy such unlawful conduct. When Dr. Easy persisted in his remedial efforts, the Defendants retaliated against him.

27. As an example of such stonewalling, in or about October 2021, Dr. Easy was presented with evidence that a White District senior administrator discriminated against, undermined, and ridiculed the District’s only Black building administrator.

28. Dr. Easy took action to oppose this unlawful conduct including pursuing disciplinary action, but the School Committee resisted such actions, creating excessive unnecessary delays and other practical and procedural impediments to addressing the workplace discrimination.

29. The School Committee's stonewalling was so pervasive that Dr. Easy had to retain separate legal counsel on behalf of the District. Counsel agreed that Dr. Easy's efforts were warranted and appropriate and supported the issuance of an intent to dismiss the administrator from employment.

30. As another example, in or about September 2022, the School Committee urged Dr. Easy to relinquish a harassment prevention order he had obtained to protect himself from a Town employee who had leveled particularly vitriolic racist attacks. Among other things, this female Town employee—who worked downstairs from Dr. Easy's office—baselessly called him a “thug and a destroyer,” and referred to him as “a destroyer of relationships, and of goals of this town.”

31. As a further example of Defendants' unlawful retaliation, in or about June 2022, Chair Ryan suggested Dr. Easy would face consequences for opposing discrimination—calling such opposition by Dr. Easy “bullshit” and suggesting he had done himself a “significant disservice” by raising such concerns.

32. In the spring and early summer of 2022, Defendants—and Chair Ryan in particular—denigrated a pair of candidates for employment, demeaning and diminishing their experience because it was obtained in Everett—*i.e.*, a community where nearly 15% of residents are Black, about double the percentage of Black people in Massachusetts.

33. Dr. Easy expressed concern that such conduct and comments were unlawfully racist, including at a June School Committee meeting. Chair Ryan and Vice Chair Grieco attacked him for expressing these concerns, suggesting that Dr. Easy did not “know his place,” or words to that effect.

34. As Dr. Easy's opposition to unlawful discrimination became more vocal, the retaliation against him intensified and Defendants sought to terminate his employment. In October

2022, Chair Ryan seized upon meritless and retaliatory complaints of one White, male District principal in order to engineer Dr. Easy's removal.

35. At an Administrative Council meeting on October 13, 2022 (the "Oct. 13 Meeting"), Dr. Easy gave a presentation about teacher-on-teacher harassment at multiple schools, and specifically raised a recent case of race discrimination at the high school, while imploring his fellow senior administrators to live up to Wayland's stated values, including anti-racism and anti-bullying.

36. In retaliation, one or more White members of the Administrative Council then complained to Chair Ryan. Parroting the racist trope of the "angry Black man," the White District administrators alleged—without specifics—that Dr. Easy had attacked, "bullied," and intimidated participants at the Oct. 13 Meeting.

37. Chair Ryan, in coordination with Vice Chair Grieco and others on the School Committee, began soliciting additional complaints about Dr. Easy from other attendees, and began—in violation of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law—lobbying his fellow School Committee members to take adverse action against Dr. Easy.

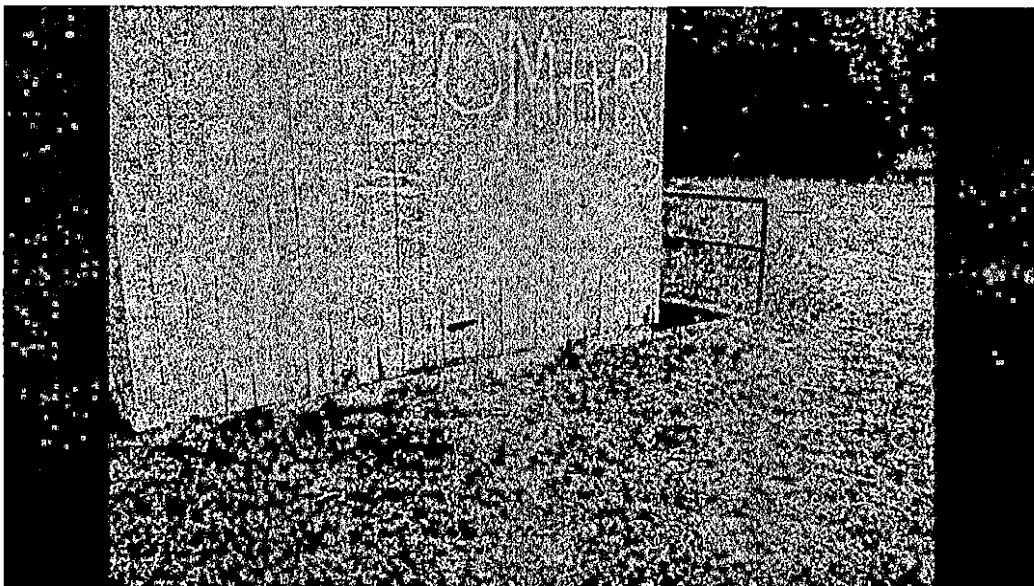
38. Upon information and belief, Chair Ryan and Vice Chair Grieco worked to coordinate and align the allegations by and between certain attendees at the October 13 Meeting, while also pressuring those who did not view Dr. Easy in a negative light to nonetheless support the campaign against Dr. Easy.

39. The School Committee, Chair Ryan, and Vice Chair Grieco were contractually required to "promptly" refer such complaints to Dr. Easy, but they refused to do so. Instead, furthering the retaliatory campaign, on October 26, 2022, in a proceeding closed to the public, the

School Committee voted to retain outside counsel in an effort to manufacture a pretext to remove Dr. Easy.

40. At subsequent meetings in November, the racist allegations against Dr. Easy, including that he was hostile and aggressive, were widely publicized, as was the School Committee's decision to hire outside counsel to "investigate" Dr. Easy.

41. On December 21, 2022, Dr. Easy was publicly humiliated when the words "OMAR = N****R" were scrawled in huge letters on a wall next to the Wayland High School, a hate crime which drew nationwide attention:



"Racist graffiti targeting superintendent found near Wayland High School" WCVB Channel 5 Reporting, available at <https://www.wcvb.com/article/racist-graffiti-targeting-staff-member-found-near-wayland-high-school/42309037>.

42. On or about January 4, 2023, at a publicly broadcasted School Committee meeting, Dr. Easy raised grave concerns about the racially hostile work environment, including without limitation this racist graffiti incident. Specifically, Dr. Easy noted, among other things that:

the public display of racism ... this graffiti on the wall ... pales in comparison to those who have been complicit in feeding this narrative, the microaggressions, the undermining, and the not so-subtle endorsement of bigotry ... I have been facing

these not-so-subtle attacks since August 21, 2021 as Superintendent of the Wayland Public Schools ... and it has gotten more and more emboldened.

43. Dr. Easy called on the School Committee to address this racially hostile work environment.

44. However, instead of working to remedy the unlawful conduct, the School Committee worked to remove Dr. Easy from his job. On or about January 18, 2023, upon information and belief, the School Committee learned that its outside attorney-investigator *found no evidence* that Dr. Easy had engaged in misconduct.

45. Rather than clear his name, the School Committee kept these findings secret so the public cloud of impropriety over Dr. Easy persisted. To this day, the School Committee has refused to release the findings of this so-called "investigation."

46. On January 19, 2023, Dr. Easy again wrote to the Defendants and explicitly raised fears that he had been subjected to unlawful discrimination and retaliation, and called upon the Defendants to take steps necessary to address the ongoing harm he was suffering.

47. Dr. Easy indicated that if the Defendants did not take such steps, he was prepared to take the actions necessary to protect and preserve his rights, including filing a formal complaint with the Commonwealth.

48. Less than three weeks later, on February 8, 2023, the School Committee removed Dr. Easy from his position without explanation or advance notice. The next morning, the Defendants notified District employees and families that Dr. Easy was being placed on leave.

49. Having refused to clear Dr. Easy of the very public allegations against him and the baseless attacks on his character, the Defendants intentionally created the false impression that Dr. Easy was placed on leave for misconduct.

50. Shortly thereafter, on or about March 16, 2023, the School Committee essentially openly admitted to unlawfully retaliating against Dr. Easy. Responding to a complaint that the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law had been violated, Chair Ryan, on behalf of the School Committee, wrote to the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General and declared that complaints against Dr. Easy were not discussed or considered when placing Dr. Easy on leave. Instead, Chair Ryan wrote that Dr. Easy was placed on leave *because* he had raised concerns about the Defendants' unlawful conduct and had indicated a willingness to file a formal complaint.

51. In its effort to quickly replace Dr. Easy, the School Committee considered five candidates for its Acting Superintendent position, all but one of whom were White, and ultimately, on April 14, 2023, the School Committee replaced Dr. Easy with a White man who had been disciplined by his last employer for plagiarism.

52. As of early March 2024, Defendants have still not restored Dr. Easy to the Superintendent position. As such, his career trajectory has been stymied and his professional reputation has been called into question and is in tatters.

53. This conduct – a so-called “indefinite” suspension with a clear intent to never return Dr. Easy to his position -- constitutes a constructive discharge, i.e., a termination.

54. As a result of Defendants' discriminatory, retaliatory, and other unlawful actions, including the promotion of and failure to remedy a hostile work environment, and retaliatory removal, Dr. Easy has suffered, and continues to suffer, significant harm, including wage damages and emotional distress.

55. As a result of Defendants' discriminatory, retaliatory, and other unlawful actions, Dr. Easy has not been able to obtain any other comparable Superintendent positions.

COUNT I
Violation of G.L. c. 151B, § 4(1) – Race and/or Color

56. Dr. Easy realleges and incorporates all paragraphs above as if fully set forth herein.

57. Through the conduct alleged above, Wayland has discriminated against Dr. Easy in the terms, conditions, and privileges of his employment based on race and color in violation of G.L. c. 151B, § 4(1).

58. As a direct and proximate result thereof, Dr. Easy has suffered and will continue to suffer damages, including, but not limited to, loss of compensation and benefits, other financial losses, loss of professional reputation, and emotional distress.

COUNT II
Violation of G.L. c. 151B, § 4(4) – Retaliation

59. Dr. Easy realleges and incorporates all paragraphs above as if fully set forth herein.

60. Through the conduct alleged as described above, Defendants retaliated against Dr. Easy in violation of G.L. c. 151B, § 4(4).

61. As a direct and proximate result thereof, Dr. Easy has suffered and will continue to suffer damages, including, but not limited to, loss of compensation and benefits, other financial losses, loss of professional reputation, and emotional distress.

COUNT III
Violation of G.L. c. 151B, § 4(4A) – Threats, Coercion, Intimidation and/or Interference

62. Dr. Easy realleges and incorporates all paragraphs above as if fully set forth herein.

63. Through the conduct alleged above, Defendants violated G.L. c. 151B, § 4(4A).

64. As a direct and proximate result thereof, Dr. Easy has suffered and will continue to suffer damages, including, but not limited to, loss of compensation and benefits, other financial losses, loss of professional reputation, and emotional distress.

COUNT IV

Violation of G.L. c. 151B, § 4(5) – Aiding, Abetting, Inciting and/or Coercion

65. Dr. Easy realleges and incorporates all paragraphs above as if fully set forth herein.

66. By aiding, abetting, inciting, compelling, and/or coercing the conduct alleged above, Chair Ryan and Vice Chair Grieco violated G.L. c. 151B, § 4(5).

67. As a direct and proximate result thereof, Dr. Easy has suffered and will continue to suffer damages, including, but not limited to, loss of compensation and benefits, other financial losses, loss of professional reputation, and emotional distress.

COUNT V

Tortious Interference with Advantageous / Contractual Relationships

68. Dr. Easy realleges and incorporates all paragraphs above as if fully set forth herein.

69. Dr. Easy has an advantageous / contractual relationship with Wayland.

70. Ryan and Grieco were aware of Dr. Easy's existing advantageous / contractual relationship with Wayland.

71. Ryan and Grieco, with malice and through improper motives and / or through the use of improper means, intentionally interfered with Dr. Easy's advantageous / contractual relationship with Wayland.

72. As a direct and proximate result thereof, Dr. Easy has suffered and will continue to suffer damages, including, but not limited to, loss of compensation and benefits, other financial losses, loss of professional reputation, and emotional distress.

COUNT VI

Breach of Contract

73. Dr. Easy realleges and incorporates all paragraphs above as if fully set forth herein.

74. Dr. Easy had a contractual relationship with Wayland.

75. By the conduct described above, Wayland has breached that contractual relationship.

76. As a direct and proximate result thereof, Dr. Easy has suffered and will continue to suffer damages, including, but not limited to, loss of compensation and benefits, other financial losses, and loss of professional reputation.

WHEREFORE, Dr. Easy respectfully requests that this Court:

1. Enter judgment in Dr. Easy's favor and against the Defendants on all Counts;
2. Award Dr. Easy compensatory damages, including, but not limited to, back pay, front pay, and lost benefits, all with interest at the statutory rate;
3. Award Dr. Easy emotional distress damages, with interest at the statutory rate;
4. Award Dr. Easy punitive damages;
5. Award Dr. Easy his attorneys' fees and costs, with interest at the statutory rate; and
6. Order such further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff Dr. Easy hereby demands a trial by jury on all Counts that are so triable.

Respectfully submitted,
Plaintiff Omar X. Easy
By his attorneys,
_____/s/ MJF_____

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