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Legal News: Cornell University

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Science Center. The University is charged with discrimination against women in hiring, promotion, tenure award, and salaries. In addition, the suit includes cases of women professionals who were given the duties of higher-level positions without commensurate titles and salaries.

Since it is a class action suit, there will be three parts to the judicial process. First, the Court will rule on the main charge of discrimination against the Stony Brook women as a class. If this is so ruled, each of the named plaintiffs will file individual claims. Then, any woman belonging to the class who feels that she was a victim of discrimination, whether she is among those who are presently employed, those who are no longer employed, or those who were denied employment, may file claims.

The case, based to a large extent on a statistical analysis which documents a consistent pattern of discrimination in employment and salaries, is very strong, and the plaintiffs are confident of victory. The University, fearing similar action on other campuses in the SUNY system, has used numerous delaying tactics and has spent enormous sums of money, far more than it would have cost to settle with the plaintiffs, in order to fight the case. The Stony Brook women, on the other hand, who initiated the case not for personal gain but in an effort to end sex discrimination on their campus, have been paying their legal fees by donating one percent of their salaries and by raising funds from other University employees. Although their lawyers are not charging for their services, the cost of statisticians, computers, depositions, and other legal fees is considerable. Twenty-five thousand dollars has already been collected and spent. The union representing SUNY academics and professionals, United University Professionals (UUP) has just given the plaintiffs $20,000, but an additional $8,000 in outstanding bills must be paid before the trial. The Stony Brook women would be grateful for any financial aid. Checks should be made out to WEAL Fund—Stony Brook Women, and sent to Box 704, Stony Brook, NY 11790. Contributions are considered charitable donations for federal income-tax purposes.

A victory for Stony Brook women will be an important precedent for all university women.

Judy Wishnia
SUNY/Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY

LEGAL NEWS:
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Friends:

I am writing to ask your support for the Cornell Eleven, a group of present and former members of the faculty who are filing a class action suit against Cornell University alleging sex discrimination in hiring, promotion, equal compensation, and other personnel practices.

We (the Friends of the Cornell Eleven) believe they have three of the four vital components of a successful suit: (1) strong cases, (2) good legal assistance, and (3) courage. What they lack is the fourth component: (4) enough money to carry this through by themselves.

Professor Mary Beth Norton or one of the other “Friends” may have been in touch with you about this effort. If, however, this is the first you have heard of our support group and our campaign, there are some aspects of it which may be news to you.

First, a gift to the Cornell Eleven will not only help finance the class action suit but will also help support various educational activities which we are sure you will favor. For instance, on November 8, 1980, the Friends of the Cornell Eleven cooperated with Cornell’s Industrial and Labor Relations Extension Division in offering a conference on the theme, “Creative Approaches to Ending Sex Discrimination in Higher Education.” The speakers were Dr. Bernice Sandler, Director of the Project on the Status and Education of Women; Professors Helen and Robert Davies (University of Pennsylvania), who presented a definitive paper on mechanisms for the resolution of sex-based employment grievances; and attorney Judith Vladeck, who reviewed recent court decisions affecting academic women. Dr. Mary Rowe of MIT, an institution with an impressive record for attracting and retaining women faculty, contributed an important paper on mentoring and networks.

Please make out your check to “Friends of the Cornell Eleven” and send it to me at P.O. Box 67, Lansing, NY 14882. If you want to add an encouraging note to the grievants, we’ll read it aloud at our next weekly meeting. And we will send you news from time to time about the progress the group is making.

We know you are fighting the good fight wherever you are. We intend to do the same here. And we will be grateful for your help.

Alice H. Cook
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