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CAIR: Disney Agrees to Allow Hijab for Ill. Muslim Intern

ANAHEIM, Calif., Sept. 27 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The Greater Los Angeles Area office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-LA) announced today that a Chicago Muslim woman employed as an intern at Disneyland in Anaheim will be allowed to wear an Islamic head scarf, or hijab, at work.

Following CAIR-LA's intervention, Disney was able to provide a clothing option that met the woman's religious requirements and that was within the company's vacation planning uniform guidelines.

CAIR-LA is now urging Disney to implement a corporate-wide policy that reflects an employee's legally-protected right to wear religious attire.

The Chicago Muslim was hired as a "vacation planner" following a phone interview through Disney's College Program. However, when she arrived in California for her training and orientation, she was asked by Disney representatives why she had not informed them of her head scarf.

She was then told she would have to take a different position with less guest interaction and would have to work in the stockroom until Disney could create a customized uniform for her in the different position. When she asked to be accommodated in the vacation planner position, she was told that a customized uniform would take approximately the length of time -- five months -- equal to the entire length of the Muslim woman's internship.

The Muslim intern stated to Disney that wearing hijab was her religious right and that not being able to work with customers would adversely impact her career goals and aspirations. She also told Disney that she had moved away from her family and paid for airfare and housing in Southern California with the understanding that she would be serving as an intern in vacation planning.

Within a week, Disney offered an accommodation for her in the vacation planner role.

"We are pleased that Disney found a way to fulfill the Muslim employee's religious accommodation request," said CAIR-LA Staff Attorney and Deputy Executive Director Ameena Qazi who also represented the Muslim intern. "This sends a message to prospective minority applicants and employees that they are a welcome and valuable addition to Disney's team."

Over the years, CAIR-LA and other CAIR offices have received complaints from Muslim women who haven't been allowed to hold front-stage jobs with Disney because of their hijab.

CAIR-LA Executive Director Hussam Ayloush last week sent a letter to Disney executives advocating a change in Disney's Look Policy, in keeping with the company's diversity initiatives, that will allow qualified Muslim women who wear the hijab to be recruited and retained as Disney employees.

Ayloush wrote in part:

"[This] case clearly demonstrates that accommodation of Muslim women's requests to wear the headscarf is possible in "front-stage" positions or positions with significant guest interaction. . . I strongly urge Disney to institutionalize a process for Muslim women, or others who make similar religious accommodation requests, to be accommodated in these front-stage positions in a timely and good faith manner."

"As you may know, the greater Los Angeles area is home to the largest concentration of American Muslims in the United States, only a piece of the increasingly diverse tapestry of Southern California and of our country. I do not see how being reflective of that diversity through its employees conflicts with Disney's interests, when doing so will only enhance the good-will shown to its clientele."

Earlier this year, another Muslim woman urged that Disney permit her to wear the hijab in her position as hostess at Disney's Grand Californian Hotel. That case is ongoing.

CAIR offers a booklet, called "An Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices," to help employers gain a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in the workplace.

SEE: An Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices

http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/employment_guide.pdf

SEE ALSO: Muslims Report Rising Discrimination at Work (NY Times)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/24/business/24muslim.html>

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

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CONTACT: CAIR-Greater Los Angeles Area Communications Manager Munira Syeda, 714-776-1847 or 714-851-4851, E-mail:

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info@losangeles.cair.com; CAIR National Communications Director Ibrahim Hooper, 202-744-7726, 202-488-8787, E-Mail: ihooper@cair.com; CAIR Communications Coordinator Amina Rubin, 202-488-8787, 202-341-4171, E-Mail: arubin@cair.com

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