

Apple made anti-union threats in Oklahoma, complaint alleges

October 6 2022, by Josh Eidelson



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Apple Inc. has been illegally threatening Oklahoma City retail workers in the lead-up to a unionization election next week, the Communications Workers of America alleged in a U.S. labor board filing.

The [company](#) is violating federal labor law by engaging in surveillance and interrogation of employees, according to the CWA's claim, which was filed with the National Labor Relations Board on Wednesday. Apple held mandatory "captive audience" anti-union meetings, threatened to withhold new perks from stores that unionized and told staff that supporting a union would be futile, the labor group said.

Apple, based in Cupertino, California, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The tech giant's retail chain, which has about 270 stores in the U.S., has become a key target for union activists after years of evading organized labor. The Oklahoma City employees are slated to vote Oct. 13 and Oct. 14 on whether to join the CWA, making their [store](#) the company's second unionized U.S. location.

Retail staff at an Apple location in Towson, Maryland, voted in June to unionize with the International Association of Machinists, marking one of several recent labor wins at prominent U.S. companies. Union drives have also made inroads at Amazon.com Inc., Starbucks Corp., Trader Joe's and Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc.

On Friday, the NLRB's general counsel issued a complaint against Apple in New York City, finding merit in allegations from the CWA that the company interrogated employees at a World Trade Center store about their workplace activism and discriminated against union supporters in enforcing a no-soliciting policy.

The agency's complaint accused Apple of "interfering with, restraining and coercing" staff in their exercise of legally protected rights. The CWA has also filed a still-pending complaint with the NLRB in Atlanta. The labor group had petitioned in April for an election at a store in that city, but then withdrew the request a week before the scheduled vote,

citing the company's conduct.

Apple said following the New York City complaint that it disagreed with the allegations. "We are fortunate to have incredible retail team members and we deeply value everything they bring to Apple," the company said in a statement Tuesday. "We regularly communicate with our teams and always want to ensure everyone's experience at Apple is the best it can be."

Claims unions file with the labor board are investigated by regional offices and—if found to have merit and not settled—can be prosecuted by the agency's general counsel and heard by administrative law judges. The rulings can be appealed to NLRB members in Washington and from there can go to federal court. The agency can require remedies such as posting of notices and reversals of policies or punishments, but it has no authority to impose punitive damages.

While the NLRB has previously held that companies can require employees to attend anti-union meetings, the agency's current general counsel, Jennifer Abruzzo, views such "captive audience" sessions as inherently coercive and illegal. Her office is pursuing cases that could change the precedent.

Apple employee Michael Forsythe, a leader in the Oklahoma campaign, said that the company has recently brought in several out-of-town managers so that his store's usual bosses can spend their time holding group and one-on-one anti-union conversations.

In one meeting he attended, the store's manager told employees that even if they unionized, their representatives would have no power to make Apple spend more money on their store. "The [budget](#) is the budget, and the only thing you can do is reallocate pieces of the pie," the manager said, according to Forsythe.

Forsythe said he's hopeful that the company will change its approach if the union prevails in next week's vote.

"Regardless of what happens, we all still have to work together," he said. "I hope it'll be a much more cooperative path forward to a contract."

2022 Bloomberg L.P.

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Apple made anti-union threats in Oklahoma, complaint alleges (2022, October 6) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2022-10-apple-anti-union-threats-oklahoma-complaint.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--