

**DEPARTMENT OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT & HOUSING**

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DEPARTMENT OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING SUES
FOREVER 21 RETAIL, INC. FOR EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION
San Francisco Store Enforced Unlawful English-Only Policy

Sacramento - The Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) today filed a lawsuit charging that Forever 21, Retail Inc. (Forever 21) violated the state's civil rights laws when it adopted an English-only policy at its flagship San Francisco store.

The suit filed in San Francisco County Superior Court, by DFEH attorney Denise Levey, alleges multiple violations of the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), which prohibits discrimination against employees based on their national origin, and specifically prohibits the adoption and enforcement of English-only rules absent a business necessity.

According to the DFEH's lawsuit, Forever 21 prohibited employees from speaking any language other than English during work hours, including when greeting one another, during employee rest breaks, and when speaking to monolingual Spanish-speaking customers. DFEH alleges that the English-only policy was specifically enforced against Forever 21's Spanish-speaking employees. When three Spanish-speaking employees complained about the policy, their work hours were reduced and they were subjected to hostile treatment from management. The employees, represented by La Raza Centro Legal, filed a discrimination complaint with DFEH.

"Rules that limit or prohibit the use of any language in the workplace, including English-only rules, run afoul of the FEHA unless justified by a business necessity," said DFEH Director Kevin Kish. "Linguistic diversity is a business reality in the California workplace, and the Department will carefully scrutinize English-only rules to ensure that all employees are treated equally, regardless of their national origin."

The DFEH is seeking compensatory damages for the employees who complained about the policy as well as injunctive relief.

The DFEH is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. The mission of the DFEH is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit the Department's Web site at www.dfeh.ca.gov.