

NEWS RELEASE

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Age Discrimination at The New Jersey Institute for Successful Aging

WORLD-RENOWNED GERONTOLOGIST BLOWS WHISTLE ON ROWAN UNIVERSITY

Stratford, NJ – December 13, 2023.

The Age Discrimination Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) was enacted to prevent people aged 40 and older from suffering injustices in employment opportunity and security. Nevertheless, according to the AARP, more than 40% of employees protected by the ADEA have experienced age discrimination in the workplace during the past three years.

Higher education is not immune from age discrimination. Universities routinely pass over older candidates with impressive credentials and outstanding evaluations for younger, less experienced candidates. Older scholars – especially women – often are pressured into retirement despite their decades of contributions and ongoing productivity.

“Having secured more NIH-funded research awards than any other scholar in Rowan University’s history – and especially as Director of Research at the New Jersey Institute for Successful Aging – I never imagined I would become the victim of age-related employment discrimination. However, I recently learned how naïve I’d been,” says Endowed Chair and tenured Professor of Medicine Rachel Pruchno at Rowan University’s School of Osteopathic Medicine.

On June 19, 2023, just months before her 69th birthday, Dr. Pruchno was informed that Rowan had decided to reclassify her appointment from Clinical Medicine to Basic Science and to reduce her salary by more than 30%. Her productivity had not changed. There were no warnings or counseling sessions. No supervisor or administrator ever had initiated any communication about changed job expectations, inadequate job performance, or desire to modify workplan goals.

The job reclassification and salary changes took effect 11 days later – on July 1, 2023 – even though such unilateral actions are unambiguous violations of both the ADEA and the agreement between Rowan University and its AAUP faculty union.

In October, after Dr. Pruchno appealed to Rowan’s Provost Anthony Lowman, he offered Dr. Pruchno a 6-month sabbatical at her proper rate, followed by the same 30% pay cut effective January 1, 2024. This offer, however, was contingent on Dr. Pruchno agreeing to sign a four-page non-disclosure agreement absolving Rowan of any wrongdoing and prohibiting her from discussing this matter.

Dr. Pruchno knows that succumbing to age discrimination – as so many other productive scholars at Rowan and other U.S. universities do – is wrong. “Age discrimination, like racism and gender bias, is bad for individuals and society. It hurts faculty and students,” said Pruchno. “Furthermore, discriminating against employees because of their age flies in the face of everything I’ve worked hard at during my career – making life better for older adults.”

The AAUP union representing Rowan faculty members has filed a formal grievance on behalf of Dr. Pruchno. She also has filed a civil complaint with the State of New Jersey.

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