

## Georgetown Beats Ex-Worker's Bias Suit Over Online Posts

By **Patrick Hoff**

*Law360 (April 3, 2026, 7:16 PM EDT)* -- Georgetown University defeated a suit claiming it unlawfully fired a Black, Muslim administrator because of years-old social media posts she made disparaging Jewish activists, with a D.C. federal judge ruling she hadn't shown she was terminated for her background rather than inflammatory online comments.

In an 82-page opinion Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Christopher R. Cooper dismissed Aneesha Johnson's race discrimination and retaliation suit against Georgetown University, several administrators, and a group of people and organizations Johnson blamed for resurfacing her 2015 social media posts in October 2023. Among the other defendants are pro-Israel website Canary Mission — which has not responded to the suit — several foundations that Johnson said had donated to Canary Mission, former Georgetown Law administrator Ilya Shapiro and student Rachel J. Wolff.

Johnson said she was hired as assistant director of academic and faculty affairs at Georgetown's Walsh School of Foreign Service in early October 2023, but the school's enthusiasm for her hiring quickly vanished. According to her complaint, colleagues interrogated her about her Palestinian heritage, and after Wolff shared Johnson's 2015 social media posts — which had been archived by Canary Mission — Georgetown suspended and ultimately fired Johnson in late November 2023.

However, Judge Cooper said Johnson had failed to tie her suspension or termination to the fact that she's Black, Muslim and of Palestinian origin. According to the opinion, tensions were high following the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, and when Johnson's social media posts caused an uproar in the Georgetown community, the school did not violate the law by letting a probationary employee go in accordance with its policies.

"Johnson's complaint fails to dispel the obvious explanation that she was suspended and then fired due to her spiteful and profane social media posts, rather than her race, religion, or national origin," Judge Cooper wrote.

The judge said Johnson also can't establish that she was subjected to a hostile work environment based on comments and emails she received after a Georgetown administrator sent a campus-wide email addressing the controversy over her social media posts.

According to Judge Cooper, Johnson failed to raise this claim in her discrimination charge with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and she failed to show her colleagues' remarks about her Palestinian background were more than stray remarks.

"While the court does not doubt that Johnson faced harsh backlash from strangers after her posts came to light, she does not allege that Georgetown had any influence over those communications, nor any particular legal duty to intervene," Judge Cooper wrote.

However, the judge granted a motion to sanction Johnson's attorney, Abdel-Rahman Hamed, warning him to "exercise greater care in bringing any similar claims in the future." The foundations that Johnson accused of donating to Canary Mission and abetting Georgetown's discrimination had sought monetary sanctions, but Judge Cooper refused, saying the complaint had already been dismissed and that there was no evidence the claims were brought in bad faith.

"The court ... appreciates the difficulties in trying to hold elusive defendants — like Canary Mission — accountable for their actions, which, again, may be what led Hamed to name the donor defendants in this suit," Judge Cooper wrote. "But such difficulties do not license attorneys to bring specious claims based essentially on mere affiliation."

Elizabeth Papez of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP, who is representing Wolff, told Law360 in a statement that they're "proud to have achieved justice for our client in this lawsuit, which improperly sought to punish her exercise of First Amendment rights and chill the expression of countless others."

Jason Torchinsky, who is representing the Adam and Gila Milstein Family Foundation, told Law360 they are "grateful that the court dismissed a case that never should have been brought in the first place," and that they are glad the court issued sanctions against Hamed. Johnson had alleged that the Milstein Family Foundation contributed to Canary Mission, though Judge Cooper said there was no suggestion that the foundation "aided and abetted Georgetown's alleged discrimination"

"We hope that this is a message that lawsuits grounded in antisemitism will face consequences," Torchinsky said.

Counsel for Georgetown University declined to comment Friday.

Representatives of Johnson, Shapiro, Canary Mission and other alleged donors to Canary Mission did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Johnson is represented by Abdel-Rahman Hamed of Hamed Law.

Georgetown University is represented by Henry A. Platt and Timothy D. Intelisano of Saul Ewing LLP.

Shapiro is represented by Jason C. Greaves, Lindsay R. McKasson and Katie L. Raymond of Binnall Law Group.

Wolff is represented by Elizabeth P. Papez, Lavi M. Ben Dor and David M. Kusnetz of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP.

The Adam and Gila Milstein Family Foundation is represented by Mark Pinkert and Jason Torchinsky of Holtzman Vogel Baran Torchinsky & Josefiak PLLC.

The Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco and the Helen Diller Family Foundation are represented by Joshua N. Drian, Douglas J. Smith, Katherine M. Herman and Kevin P. Dwight of Manatt

Phelps & Phillips LLP.

The case is Johnson v. Georgetown University et al., case number 1:25-cv-01540, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

--Editing by Neil Cohen.

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