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Former Employee Sues Kate Spade, LLC for Outrageous Employment Abuse and Discrimination

Baltimore, Maryland – A Pennsylvania woman filed suit in Maryland today against Kate Spade, LLC and its parent company, Tapestry, Inc. (collectively “Kate Spade”) alleging that a campaign of outrageous abuse in the workplace led to attempted suicide and loss of her employment. Kate Spade, LLC is a global life and style company that sells handbags, clothes, jewelry, and accessories all premised on their claim that the brand stands for “optimistic femininity” and that the “founding principles that define [their] style is synonymous with joy.”

Since the suicide of founder Kate Spade in 2018, Kate Spade, LLC has housed the Kate Spade New York Foundation claiming to “inspire women to be the heroines of their own stories” and to support mental health and suicide prevention in women. However, the former employee who was a high performing manager at the Kate Spade store in Hagerstown, Maryland alleges that management targeted her because of her age and disability, including depression, anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The plaintiff, Michelle Thiele, was hired as an Assistant Store Manager in Kate Spade’s Hagerstown store and was quickly promoted to Store Manager. She excelled driving sales up and being honored for employee retention. Because of her strong performance and leadership, Thiele was tasked to support failing stores. Thiele’s success in retail environments over a lifetime of employment came despite the trauma of a profoundly abusive childhood.

When a new regional manager was hired at Kate Spade and began targeting employees over the age of 40, everything changed for Thiele. Management discovered that loud noises – reminiscent of the unpredictable and terrifying violence of Thiele’s childhood – caused Thiele to react with visible fear. Management deliberately capitalized on this and engaged in a lengthy campaign of abuse that included firing confetti canons unexpectedly at close range to Thiele’s head even though Thiele begged them to stop and executing jump scares where the management would direct employees to hide in shelving units and jump out at Thiele, only to then laugh at her fearful response. Thiele’s PTSD became acutely activated to the point that she was afraid all the time. She begged for help and none was offered. Instead management escalated the campaign and retaliated against Thiele for seeking help.

Despite her obvious fear and requests that the canons and jump scares targeted at her disability stop, Kate Spade failed to investigate, act to protect, or accommodate Thiele. Thiele

suffered severe depression and anxiety, and attempted suicide. She was ultimately terminated in response to her requests for accommodation.

Thiele said, “It would be easier to stay silent about the humiliation I experienced at Kate Spade, but my hope is that in speaking out I will not only find courage within myself to demand dignified treatment, but I will help others who experience this kind of unacceptable abuse at work.”

“The campaign of discrimination and abuse that this employee was subjected to goes against everything Kate Spade claims it represents,” said Mary Vargas, an attorney with Stein & Vargas, LLP, which represents Thiele. “We are at a crossroads where women are standing together in support of each other and we have to name this kind of abusive and discriminatory behavior for what it is and end it.”

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Stein & Vargas, LLP is a civil rights firm based in Washington, D.C. and committed to the principle that all people have full and equal access to all parts of society.

CONTACT:

Stein & Vargas, LLP

Mary Vargas

240-793-3185

Mary.Vargas@steinvargas.com