

In My Own Words

LOPEZ V. RIVER OAKS

Izza Lopez is a 26-year-old transgender woman who applied for the position of scheduler with River Oaks Imaging and Diagnostic, a medical imaging company in Houston. She was invited in for an interview, completed a background check and drug test, and in October 2005, she was asked to start work as soon as possible. Lopez gave notice to her then-current employer but days later received a call from River Oaks's human resources director and one of its employment recruiters saying that the company was rescinding its offer because Lopez had "misrepresented" herself as a woman. Lambda Legal has filed a federal lawsuit against River Oaks claiming that it discriminated against Lopez unlawfully based on her sex. Lopez reflects here on her experience with River Oaks and why she chose to file this lawsuit.

When I applied for the job as scheduler at River Oaks, I had almost the same job at one of their competitors. A friend of mine who worked at River Oaks told me they were looking for a scheduler, and the pay was two dollars more per hour than I was making. I decided to look into it.

From the start with River Oaks, I was upfront about my status as a transgender person. My friend who told me about the job of course knew my status, and I asked her to make sure that the supervisor would be okay with it, because I didn't want to possibly subject myself to harassment.

When my friend told me that the supervisor welcomed my application for the position, I sent in my resume. It all happened pretty fast after that. The interview process went well, I passed a background check and drug test, and soon after that they offered me the job, and we agreed on my start date. The next day, I gave my former employer notice of my resignation.

I was really happy and looking forward to starting my new job and making more money at River Oaks. But almost a week after they offered me my job, I got a call from their director of human resources, who had one of their employment recruiters on the line with her. They told me that they were taking back the job offer because I "misrepresented" myself to them as a woman.

I was shocked. I'd taken all the steps I could think of to protect myself from

this kind of bias, and here it was on the other end of the telephone, coming from someone who I thought — who I was told — was my future employer.

They didn't want me to work there simply because I'm transgender. That hurt. They made me feel like I was a monster or something that they didn't want to have around.

When my future job was taken away from me, I asked my former employer if I could keep the job I'd just resigned from, but they said no. I spent months looking for work, but it's hard finding a job when you don't have one — especially if you're a transgender person. Ultimately, a family member gave me a job as a nanny.

I contacted Lambda Legal because I don't want other people to have to go through what I went through with River Oaks. What they did was wrong and humiliating — and illegal. I'm not only standing up for myself but for everyone else who has ever been discriminated against by an employer, especially people in the transgender community.

I'm a pretty private person, but if I have to sacrifice some of my privacy to inspire other people to stand up for their rights, that's a sacrifice I'm ready to make. **L**



Izza Lopez

For more information about your rights in the workplace, see Lambda Legal's publication *Out at Work: A Tool Kit for Workplace Equality*. The kit gives an overview of the laws in the United States that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and HIV status. It also provides an extensive Q&A about common workplaces issues for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and people with HIV, and what you should do to protect yourself if you experience discrimination in your workplace. Visit www.lambdalegal.org to download your copy of *Out at Work* or contact the Lambda Legal office in your region (see contact information on the back cover of *Impact*) to request a copy.

