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Former Jeans Warehouse CEO sues over sexual orientation discrimination

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The former chief executive officer of Hawaii-based retailer Jeans Warehouse Inc. has filed a discrimination and retaliation lawsuit against the employer, claiming sexual orientation discrimination.

William Estill, 65, was dismissed by the Jeans Warehouse board before the 2014 holiday sales season and claims that he was subjected to anti-gay comments and hostility by company officials.

Estill, who is openly gay, was told he was fired for performance reasons despite the company posting record-breaking sales and profits during 2012 and 2013, the complaint said. Estill also acted as the company's chief operating officer for Cindy Mikami, who took time off to care for her ailing husband, the complaint said.

"Despite weak market conditions and unexpected demands, Mr. Estill guided Jeans Warehouse to steady growth as CEO and acting COO," says Dallas attorney Rogge Dunn of Clouse Dunn LLP, who represents Estill along with attorneys from Honolulu's law office of Eric Seitz. "Coming off a record year, the only reason a company would replace its CEO is if the decision is based on something other than actual performance."

The lawsuit claims board member Linda Holt and Mikami made anti-gay comments during the 4 1/2 years he worked for the company. The lawsuit includes claims of discrimination and disparate treatment, retaliatory termination and both negligent and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Shortly before his dismissal, Estill formally complained about Holt's and Mikami's behavior, the complaint said.

"He expected the company to take his concerns seriously," Dunn said. "But instead, he was subjected to continued ridicule and insults of a personal nature that culminated with his obviously illegal dismissal."

Mikami said she was aware of the complaint but did not want to comment until she had read it.