



Commissioner Brad Avakian
Bureau of Labor and Industries

Press Release

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BOLI Commissioner Awards \$127,713 in Sex Harassment Case

Ashland employer created hostile workplace, fired employee for asking that it stop

PORTLAND- State Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian has issued a final order in the sexual harassment case against From the Wilderness, Inc. (FTWI) and Michael Ruppert of Ashland. In addition to awarding lost wages, Comm. Avakian ordered \$125,000 in mental and emotional suffering damages paid to Lindsay Gerken for the workplace harassment and retaliation she suffered during her less than three months of employment at FTWI. The damage award reflects the egregious conduct of Ruppert as well as the reinvigoration of civil rights enforcement by Commissioner Avakian.

“BOLI conducts unbiased, third-party investigations of the complaints we receive,” said Commissioner Avakian. “But when the investigation finds substantial evidence of a law violation, we will vigorously pursue justice. In this case, BOLI’s investigation discovered compelling evidence that fully justifies this damage award.”

Gerken filed a complaint alleging sexual harassment by Ruppert during her employment with FTWI and for retaliation for terminating her after she refused his advances. Amid a continuing pattern of harassment that began shortly after Gerken’s hire, the most startling incident occurred when Ruppert came to Gerken’s office door wearing only his underwear and a smile. Explicitly invited to engage in a sexual relationship with Ruppert on a Friday, Gerken declined and was terminated the following week.

“BOLI will not allow employers to ignore fundamental protections for workers rights,” Commissioner Avakian continued. “Sexual harassment of this magnitude is a brazen violation of the law and the damages ordered here will clearly show BOLI’s commitment to aggressively enforcing the law.”

At the time the harassment and retaliation occurred, Lindsay Gerken was 25 years old and just beginning her professional career. Michael Ruppert was in his mid-50s and a “celebrity” investigative journalist in the literary community surrounding “peak oil” and sustainability. He publishes *From the Wilderness* magazine and a blog on current events under the same title.

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