



Chicago Workers Collaborative

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Cain Misconduct Tip of Iceberg in Restaurant Industry Female Worker Denounces Burger King for Tolerating Sexual Misconduct of Manager

CHICAGO, IL - The tolerance of sexual abuse towards women at the highest levels of the restaurant industry is stirring reaction among restaurant employees. On Monday, one employee, Airsa Pineda, turned her outrage into action by filing sexual harassment charges against Heartland Illinois Food Corporation, a major Burger King franchise owner.

In her charge, Ms Pineda claims that, while working at Burger King in Palatine, IL in July 2011, she was sexually assaulted by her male manager on the evening shift while both were closing the restaurant. According to the police report, after inappropriately touching her, the manager followed Ms. Pineda into a small back room, pushed her against the wall, forcibly kissed her and reached under her shirt to grab her breast, among other unlawful acts. While the alleged attack took place in a secluded area of the store, the restaurant's video system, seized by the Palatine Police Department, is believed to have recorded the manager's inappropriate groping prior to the attack. "He [the manager] knew I was pregnant, so during the attack he put his hand on my stomach, slipped \$30.00 between my breasts, and said that I would need this money for my baby." According to Ms. Pineda, when she reported the incident to the company, management accused her of lying and has retaliated against her by cutting her hours. Meanwhile the manager in question is believed to have been assigned to manage a different Burger King restaurant owned by the same franchise.

"If Burger King had supported me instead of punishing me for speaking up about how I was attacked, I would be satisfied. Instead, Burger King is sending a message to us women employees that it's O.K. for managers to assault us and we better not complain," states Airsa.

Ms. Pineda is a member of the Chicago Workers' Collaborative, a non-profit organization dedicated to educate low-wage workers to understand their workplace rights.

[Heartland Food Corp.](#) is the second largest Franchisees of the Burger King Restaurant chain, operating in 4 Midwest States and Canada and serving over 45 million customers per year. Sexual misconduct among its managers is nothing new at Burger King. The burger giant has been subject to numerous suits ([the latest filed in July 2011 in Detroit](#)) and paid out hundreds of thousands of dollars to settle EEOC harassment suits in [Winston Salem, N.C.](#) (2009) and in [St. Louis, MO](#) (2004). Prior to owning Godfather's Pizza, Herman Cain, who is now being accused of sexual misconduct while head of the National Restaurant Association, oversaw the operations of about 500 Burger King stores in the Philadelphia region ([Minneapolis StarTribune](#)). While Cain's Burger King connection may only be a coincidence, the numerous settlements and allegations of sexual misconduct at Burger King as well as those made specifically against Mr. Cain during his tenure at the National Restaurant Association, are cause for great concern.

"In our current economic recession, low-wage workers feel especially obligated to accept all kinds of abuse to keep their jobs" adds Leone Jose Bicchieri, Executive Director of the Chicago Workers' Collaborative, "Our organization remains dedicated to supporting those courageous workers who publicly demand respect, and we must especially support women in the workplace to expose and eradicate all forms of sexual abuse."

On Monday, Ms. Pineda will join a growing number of women who are coming forward to denounce sexual abuse against Burger King, the National Restaurant Association and workplaces everywhere. "Don't be afraid," says Pineda, "The only way we can stop sexual exploitation is by speaking up."

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