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Former Security Supervisor at JFK Sues for Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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October 10, 2017 – The law firm of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP (ECBA) filed a federal discrimination and sexual harassment complaint on behalf of LaDonna Powell, a 32-year-old black woman formerly employed as a supervisor for Allied Universal Security Services (Allied) at John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK). Allied, one of the nation’s largest security firms, contracts with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (Port Authority) to provide security services at JFK.

The lawsuit alleges that, during her four-year employment at Allied, Powell was the victim of a workplace culture dominated by sex, harassment, and abuse of female and black employees. It alleges that Powell was forced to watch live and recorded videos of her colleagues engaging in sex acts, solicited by her supervisors for sex, and subjected to countless incidents of lewd comments and inappropriate touching.

“This was not an isolated incident of workplace harassment,” said Elizabeth Saylor, a partner at ECBA and counsel for Powell. “This was a campaign of harassment, discrimination, and retaliation led by Allied’s top management at JFK. And Ms. Powell was not the only victim—we’ve spoken to multiple women who say they’ve experienced the same hazing and abuse.”

According to the suit, when Powell and others refused to acquiesce to supervisors’ sexual demands, they received worse shifts, worse assignments, and they were denied bathroom breaks and lunch breaks—to the point where, on multiple occasions, Ms. Powell was forced to urinate in a cup in the middle of her shift.

Powell says that Allied managers at JFK (including two ex-NYPD officers) were aware of the discriminatory conduct and either ignored it or encouraged it. The lawsuit alleges that Powell repeatedly reported sexual harassment and race discrimination, including the use of the n-word on multiple occasions by an Allied supervisor. Yet instead of addressing Powell’s complaints, Allied terminated her.

“Allied’s decision to fire Ms. Powell after she complained about discrimination is textbook retaliation,” said Alanna Kaufman, another ECBA attorney representing Ms. Powell. “Ms. Powell is someone who spoke up and sought change on behalf of herself and others. She was a

star employee, and the fact that Allied fired her shows how deep the discriminatory culture runs.”

Although Powell’s complaints were disregarded by Allied at the time, she hopes that her lawsuit will motivate the company to make necessary changes to its discriminatory workplace culture.

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