

*Federal order bars Starbucks
from firing workers for union
activity*

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Seattle, February 20 (RHC)-- In the U.S., a federal judge issued a nationwide order barring Starbucks from firing union organizers -- a ruling that affirmed a long-established law which workers say the coffee chain has violated hundreds of times since unionizing efforts were first launched in Buffalo, New York in 2021.

U.S. District Judge Mark Goldsmith ruled in Michigan that former shift supervisor Hannah Whitbeck must be reinstated in her position, which she was fired from in April 2022. Whitbeck and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) Detroit Regional Director Elizabeth Kerwin argued that she had been fired

because of her involvement in union organizing at the store where she worked in Ann Arbor — one of 366 Starbucks stores across the U.S. where employees have organized to create bargaining units. Nearly 300 stores have won union elections so far.

Starbucks Workers United, the employees' union, has accused the company of firing more than 200 employees in illegal retaliation for organizing. The company claimed Whitbeck was fired for leaving 20 to 30 minutes early a single time without finding someone to fill in for her, but Kerwin argued that would have been a violation of Starbucks' own policy of issuing a warning for such an incident. Kerwin also noted that Starbucks was aware Whitbeck was involved in unionization efforts.

Jennifer Abruzzo, general counsel for the NLRB, said the nationwide order was significant. "The district court's ruling confirms that Starbucks continues to violate the law in egregious ways, thus requiring a nationwide cease and desist order," Abruzzo told Bloomberg.

The NLRB has issued 75 complaints against Starbucks for unfair labor practices, including intimidating and retaliating against workers who are organizing.

"Firing workers for organizing is already illegal, of course," said Starbucks Workers United, the employees' union, of Goldsmith's order. "But this decision is HUGE for getting speedy justice for those retaliated against."

Goldsmith ordered Starbucks to post physical copies of the order at the Ann Arbor store and to read it at a mandatory meeting. The company was given 21 days to file an affidavit declaring it had complied.

Starbucks reported a 31% annual growth in profits in 2021, the year workers began unionizing, as well as \$8.1 billion just in the fourth quarter of that year. Still, the company has aggressively fought union efforts by holding captive-audience meetings with CEO Howard Schultz and threatening the rights of workers who get involved in organizing efforts. This past week, Starbucks refused to send Schultz to testify before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee on the company's conduct.

Goldsmith's ruling showed that the company "can't just fire" its way out of listening to workers, said economic justice group Fight for \$15. "Love to see the NLRB push back against Starbucks' intimidation tactics," said the group. "Unionizing is a right!"

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