

## Former Planned Parenthood employee wins lawsuit in Benton County

LAST UPDATED: JULY 11TH, 2012 11:11 PM (PDT)

After an eight-year battle, a former Planned Parenthood employee won a lawsuit in Benton County alleging that the organization fired her because of a disability.

Shannon Sharp worked for Planned Parenthood of Central Washington as a regional manager before being diagnosed with degenerative arthritis in her neck and back that required ongoing medical treatment, her attorney Mike Saunders of Seattle told the Herald.

Her neck and back pain sometimes made Sharp unable to perform all of her job functions, and her lawsuit alleged that Planned Parenthood fired Sharp rather than provide reasonable accommodations.

Planned Parenthood -- now Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho -- claimed in court that it fired Sharp because of her performance.

"In our view, we followed all laws and professional protocols when we terminated her employment due to performance; however, recently a court agreed that the former employee's claims had some merit," Planned Parenthood officials said in a statement. "While we believe we followed all laws, we respect the court process, and we are grateful this legal process has concluded so that we can continue to focus on patient care.

Saunders said Sharp had never received a negative performance evaluation or reprimand, and that the organization's human resources department performed no independent investigation.

The lawsuit was filed in 2004, but Washington's anti-discrimination law was unsettled for several years because of court battles and legislative changes, Saunders said.

The case finally came to trial in June, and a jury on June 27 awarded more than \$136,000 to Sharp after finding that she was fired because of her disability.

"After waiting more than eight years for her cause to be heard at trial, Ms. Sharp deeply appreciates the jury's hard work and careful attention to the evidence in holding Planned Parenthood and (CEO) Karl Eastlund accountable for their discriminatory conduct," Saunders said.

But some questions remain pending before a Benton County Superior Court judge, including additional remedies, he said.

© Copyright 2012 Tacoma News, Inc.