

1-19-2001

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### Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "01/19/2001 - Statement on Status of Abebe Lawsuit.pdf" (2001). 2001. 9.  
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# NEWS

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Statement on Status of Abebe Lawsuit

Jan. 19, 2001

Eastern Illinois University's attorneys have filed a motion to strike and dismiss portions of a civil rights lawsuit filed by former Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Teshome Abebe against Eastern and its president, Carol Surles.

In the lawsuit filed Nov. 14 in U.S. District Court in Urbana, Abebe alleges discrimination on the basis of sex, race and national origin. The university has investigated Abebe's complaints internally and found them to be unfounded. Abebe served as EIU's provost and VPAA from March 1998 to March 2000 when he was reassigned to his tenured position in the Department of Economics with a salary commensurate with his faculty duties.

In addressing insufficiencies of the allegations under applicable law, EIU attorneys on Jan. 12 filed a motion in U.S. District Court in Urbana that would not allow Abebe to receive punitive damages against EIU in the case, stating that U.S. law prevents a plaintiff from recovering punitive damages from a public entity such as Eastern.

EIU attorneys have also made a motion to strike Abebe's charges against the university and Surles that in a May 4, 2000 letter from Surles' private attorney, Surles "conspired to attempt to intimidate Abebe and deny him equal protection of the law" by threatening to sue him for defamation should he persist in his complaints of discrimination.

The motion refers to the letter which simply states "that false and defamatory statements in any public way will be met by all lawful efforts to protect and vindicate Dr. Surles' reputation." The motion also states that the letter is not unlawful, does not represent an adverse act, does not result in injury and does not form the proper basis for any of the claims against Surles or the university and should be stricken from the complaint. Finally, the motion asks that the part of the complaint alleging conspiracy to deprive Abebe of equal protection of the law be dismissed, because Abebe did not allege sufficient facts of conspiracy.

After the court rules on the motion, the university will respond to each specific allegation that remains.

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Eastern Illinois University emphasizes distinguished teaching in the liberal arts, sciences and selected professions. A traditional, residential state university of recognized quality, Eastern enrolls more than 10,000 students in undergraduate and graduate programs. The university, located in Charleston, also serves the region through a variety of non-credit and off-site degree programs, as well as cultural and recreational opportunities. Eastern's pursuit of excellence attracts well-qualified students of an increasingly diverse population and a teaching faculty active in research and public service who utilize the latest technology.