

BRIEFING

Curtains for Dismissal of Dyslexic Actor

February 2020

The WRC has awarded an actor €20,000 for disability discrimination after she was dismissed from a musical production, due to what was claimed were “creative differences”.

A solicitor for a Dublin-based production company informed the actor’s agent, in writing, that the actor’s dyslexia was “hampering her progress”, after she was dismissed from the musical in September 2018.

The complainant auditioned twice for a musical in the summer of 2018; on both occasions she notified the respondent that she was dyslexic, which can affect her ability to “cold read” scripts. She was invited to rehearsals in September and she and two other actors performed the first act of the musical for the respondent director and the director of the musical. Two days later her agent was informed that the complainant was being released from her role. When her agent sought the complainant’s wages and the reason why she was dropped, it was informed by letter from the respondent’s solicitor that the actor’s dyslexia was “hampering her progress”.

In evidence before the WRC, the respondent’s solicitor said that sending the letter was his mistake and that he was not instructed to do so. The director of the musical said he decided not to keep the actor in the production as she was not keeping up to speed. In further evidence, the director of the musical stated that he was not aware of the complainant’s dyslexia until after she was dismissed. The WRC did not accept the respondent’s denial in this regard, pointing to correspondence with the complainant’s agent which showed that the director was aware of the actor’s dyslexia from the outset.

The WRC noted the respondent made no enquiries nor discussed with her what measures were required to accommodate her disability before dismissing her. The WRC noted the reputational damage a dismissal in the entertainment industry can cause and awarded the claimant €20,000 in compensation.

This case provides an important reminder of an employer’s duty to make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities in the workplace.



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