

How Multiple Sclerosis Cost Me My Job

By Jennifer Akridge

For 27 years, I loyally worked for Alfa Corporation, successor to the Alabama Farm Bureau Insurance empire. In 1989, I started my one and only job ever at Alfa, 2 years before I graduated from Auburn University in 1991. By 1995, I was honored with being named the Alfa Employee of the Year, out of approximately 950 employees in the Montgomery home office.

Ominously, in 1993 I discovered that I had developed Multiple Sclerosis, including severe migraine headaches. Fortunately, health insurance covered the high cost of medication, sometimes as much as \$12,000 in a months' time.

Medicine nonetheless enabled me to work at full capacity, and at first, Alfa supported me as I advanced to a mid-manager position in the Underwriting department. In 2016, I even personally helped Alfa save as much as \$2 million in strategic un-



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derwriting costs, a fact confirmed by my immediate supervisor at Alfa.

Shockingly, on December 2, 2016, Alfa informed me that I was immediately terminated, saying automation, reorganization, and cutting costs necessitated my removal.

Yet all other Alfa employees affected by the same change were moved to other jobs at Alfa. The only difference is that none of the others had MS or any other similarly expensive disabilities.

Alfa has denied that it terminated me due to the high costs (tens of thousands

annually) for my medical treatment, which would be disability discrimination, in violation of the Americans With Disabilities Act and other federal laws. But there is no other plausible explanation, with all others keeping their jobs and my supervisors confirming the high quality of my work.

Alfa may be the most powerful corporation in Alabama, routinely throwing \$100,000 into each State Senate race it supports and \$50,000 into each state house candidate it supports, totaling millions of dollars. Political columnist Steve Flowers, who confirms those numbers, says that Alfa is the "King of Goat Hill", namely the state capital in Montgomery.

Alfa controls the Alabama legislature through its unlimited money and army of lobbyists. But somehow Alfa doesn't have enough dollars to pay the health insurance costs for an MS patient like me.

Alfa's motto "We Care", is extremely hypocritical. It obviously does not apply to people, but only to the Big Money that Alfa worships. And when I attempted to take the deposition of Alfa's top Human Resources official, the one with the most overall knowledge about what happened, I was prevented from doing so.

Under federal Cobra law, my health insurance extension ran out this past June 30, 2018. I am now without any coverage to cover the continuing excruciating migraine headaches.

I know that other productive employees at other companies have met similar fates due to the high cost of MS coverage. Challenges in court are ineffective because it takes years to get to trial. If anyone else agrees this is wrong, please write Mr. Jimmy Parnell, President, Alfa Insurance at 2108 East South Boulevard, Montgomery, AL 36116 and tell him so.

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