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## **Three Workers with Disabilities Previously Paid Subminimum Wages Sue Roppe Industries for Employment Discrimination**

**The National Federation of the Blind Supports Litigation Brought by Brown,  
Goldstein & Levy, LLP, and Disability Rights Ohio**

**December 18, 2018**

COLUMBUS, OHIO – Three long-time employees of Seneca Re-Ad, a workshop in Fostoria that acts as the Sampling Division for the manufacturer Roppe Corporation, are hoping to gain an equal chance to do their jobs and access the same advancement, pay and benefit opportunities as other Roppe workers. A lawsuit filed today in the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Ohio by [Disability Rights Ohio \(DRO\)](#) and the Baltimore law firm of [Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP](#), with support from the [National Federation of the Blind](#), alleges discrimination by Roppe and Seneca Re-Ad with assistance from the Seneca County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

The complaint outlines a number of ways in which Roppe Corporation, an internationally-known flooring manufacturer that reported sales of \$72.7 million in 2017, publicly considers Seneca Re-Ad a critical part of its organization but fails to meet its equal employment responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For instance, Roppe clients are often given tours of the organization's manufacturing facilities, with a stop at what it calls its Sampling Division – the Seneca Re-Ad facility where people with disabilities turn out more than 25 million merchandise samples each year. But these highly productive employees, including plaintiffs Pamela Steward, Mark Felton and Ralph (Joe) Magers, are not paid the prevailing wage offered to other Roppe

employees, are denied robust cross-training and the chance to advance through the company and receive the same benefits, including health insurance, vacation time or retirement plans.

The lawsuit further alleges that Ms. Steward, Mr. Felton and Mr. Majors have been denied reasonable accommodations required by the ADA to do their jobs. Ms. Steward has asthma but is not regularly provided with a thirty-cent protective mask to prevent her from inhaling rubber dust, even though she has made weekly requests for one. Mr. Majors is blind and needs the floor tiles for the samples he assembles to be organized by color, but this is not done. Furthermore, he has been provided with only printed training materials, although he has repeatedly requested verbal and tactile training. Mr. Felton has Autism and needs regular breaks to avoid becoming overstimulated and to reorient himself, but he is denied these breaks or is disciplined for taking them.

“Roppe Corporation now has an opportunity to lead the way in the manufacturing sector by providing truly integrated employment for the people with disabilities they say they value,” says Disability Rights Ohio Director of Advocacy Kerstin Sjoberg. “We hope Roppe will work with us to create something brand new that would be groundbreaking not only in the Seneca County community, but also in the state of Ohio.”

“The work arrangement in which these three individuals and their coworkers are trapped is a textbook example of virtually everything that is wrong with the segregated model of employment for people with disabilities, which is based on low expectations and erroneous stereotypes,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “Roppe Corporation is missing an opportunity to be a model employer of people with disabilities. Instead, the company appears to be willing to exploit them for cheap labor, while both it and Seneca County officials shamelessly tout that exploitation as a public good.”

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**About Disability Rights Ohio:** *Disability Rights Ohio is the federally and state designated Protection and Advocacy System and Client Assistance Program for the state of Ohio. The mission of Disability Rights Ohio is to advocate for the human, civil and legal rights of people with disabilities in Ohio. Disability Rights Ohio provides legal advocacy and rights protection to a wide range of people with disabilities.*

[disabilityrightsohio.org](http://disabilityrightsohio.org)

**About Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP:** *Brown, Goldstein & Levy is a 22-lawyer law firm based in Baltimore, Maryland, that handles cases of every stripe, both civil and criminal, including an active disability rights practice. [browngold.com](http://browngold.com)*

**About the National Federation of the Blind:** *The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), headquartered in Baltimore, is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in*

*the fifty states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. The NFB defends the rights of blind people of all ages and provides information and support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. We believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality. Learn more about our many programs and initiatives at [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org).*