

**\*\*ATTENTION EDITORS\*\***  
**PLAINTIFFS CAMERON GAZAWAY AND ROBERT WILSON,  
AND THEIR ATTORNEY, ARE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS  
AT ANY TIME WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 27**

*MEDIA CONTACT*

*Robert Frank, 206-790-6324*

*Newsroom Public Relations*

**LAWSUIT: Two NASA fire battalion chiefs terminated after 28 years when agency suddenly changes hiring rules aimed at getting rid of them due to their age and legally protected workplace complaints**

*Both men were told they needed AA degrees in basic firefighting to keep their jobs, despite experience, training and certifications that far exceed the new prerequisite*

**SAN JOSE, Calif., Sept. 27, 2023** — Two longtime Battalion Chiefs of the NASA Ames Fire Department were illegally fired because of their age and complaints they made against the space agency managers who mocked them because they were older workers, according to a new federal lawsuit.

Cameron Gazaway and Robert Wilson were both 53-years-old when they were fired last September on the pretext of not holding AA degrees in fire science. They were given less than 45 days to obtain the degree or lose their jobs, according to the lawsuit.

“Two separate universities’ certifications that Plaintiffs’ respective years of experience and training far exceeded this requirement were rejected,” the lawsuit states. “An AA in Fire Science was not required at any other NASA location. This educational requirement targeted and only impacted ... Gazaway and Wilson. With this new requirement, they were expected to have more educational training than the Fire Chief (their direct supervisor).”

They were informed of the new job prerequisite after managers’ taunts and harassment about their ages led them to try to organize a bargaining unit within the department’s union, the lawsuit states.

This isn’t the first time NASA has been accused of illegally targeting older workers. NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in June 2020 agreed to pay \$10

million to settle accusations of age discrimination involving dozens of employees, including firefighters. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's lawsuit alleged that since at least 2010, JPL systematically laid off employees over the age of 40 in order to retain younger workers.

"Cameron and Rob dedicated their lives to protecting others, starting with military careers and as founding members of NASA Ames Fire Department," said plaintiffs' attorney [Chambord Benton-Hayes](#) of Oakland-based Benton Employment Law. "They helped build that department, and earned dozens of advanced professional certifications along the way. They trained firefighters, served as the department's IT admin, served as director of Emergency Medical Services, and more. Their hair turns gray and suddenly they no longer are qualified?"

"It's obvious they were singled out for firing by NASA — which generally hits targets it aims at," Benton-Hayes added. "No other NASA facility fire department requires this entry-level college degree, only here at Ames. And all they asked for was enough time to meet the requirement — which NASA denied, and then used their lack of the degree as the pretext to end their careers."

Both men already hold different AA degrees, which they completed after a new contract in 2008 gave department employees a year to earn a two-year degree in any subject.

During the past several years, NASA department leaders made repeated jokes and derogatory comments about the men's ages, calling them "old man" or mocking their gray hair. Gazaway, who is Black and a Messianic Christian, was also derided for his race and religion.

"This has been devastating," Gazaway said. "We planned to retire from Moffett Field with dignity and respect. NASA discarded us like trash because we complained about discrimination and tried to unionize. I don't want this to happen to anyone else who dedicates their life to protecting others."

"I lost my identity and sense of purpose when I lost my job after 28 years of service at Moffett field," Wilson said. "The arbitrary AA in fire science was specifically designed to push us out of our jobs as older workers. We should have been teaching the fire science classes, not be required to attend them. NASA's actions were despicable."

The lawsuit also names two contractors as defendants. NASA Ames Fire Department Battalion Chiefs are jointly supervised by all three entities. The lawsuit was filed Sept. 18 in U.S. District Court's San Jose division (Gazaway and Wilson v. Nelson (NASA), et al. 5:23-cv-04781.)

*Chambord Benton-Hayes successfully represents clients in litigation and arbitration concerning sexual harassment, various forms of discrimination, retaliation, wrongful termination, and harassment, both individually and in class actions. Additionally, she negotiates executive compensation and severance agreements, employing either strategic negotiation or assertive litigation based on the case needs, backed by substantial experience.*