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Muslim woman sues MTA after being kicked off bus in Jamaica



By Alina Suriel / asuriel@queenscourier.com / Friday, November 13, 2015 / 3:08 PM

The MTA is being sued by a devout Muslim woman alleging that she was unjustly removed from a public bus in Queens for wearing an Islamic religious garment.

The incident occurred after Maria Louis boarded the Q110 bus in Jamaica on May 26, 2012 wearing a burqa, a veil covering the entire body as a symbol of her faith.

According to Louis' legal counsel, she was standing in the passenger area at the front of the bus when Stephen Wright — a bus driver and MTA Bus Company employee — told her she was “scary” and “nobody can see her.”

In response, Louis said she is a Muslim and has a right to practice her religion, and reported Wright to authorities for discrimination when he stopped the bus and ordered her to leave.

Two NYPD officers responded to the scene, and after hearing from both of the parties involved, the officers asked Ms. Louis to step off the bus and asked Wright to produce a free bus pass for her. Louis complied and took a cab.

According to the suit, Wright contended he only asked her to leave because she was standing beyond the white line and when he asked her to step back, she became angry and accused him of discrimination.

Although Wright called his dispatcher and recounted the situation, he allegedly never mentioned that she crossed the white line on the bus.

During his conversation with the dispatcher, Wright allegedly said that, because of the way Louis was dressed, “I don’t know if it is a man; I don’t know if it is a woman; I don’t know what it is” and he was afraid that “she would stab me in the back.”

The dispatcher told Wright that a supervisor will come down to assist him, but he drove away before the supervisor arrived. Louis filed complaints with the MTA via telephone and mail a few days later, and filed a claim against the MTA on June 22, 2012.

Wright was later reprimanded for leaving the scene before his supervisor arrived.

Wright is named in the suit, along with the City of New York, the MTA and the police officer involved in the incident. Although all of the claims against New York city and some of the claims against the MTA have been dismissed, Louis' case was partially accepted by the court this week and will continue against the transit authority and other defendants.

An MTA representative declined to comment, citing an agency protocol against commenting on pending lawsuits.