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Pentagon fired Havana Syndrome officer over disability requests, suit alleges

A standing desk request, a distant reassignment, then a firing



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A former Defense Intelligence Agency officer says she was fired after requesting disability accommodations while helping investigate Havana Syndrome.

That is the account in a complaint filed July 6, 2026 in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. For HR leaders, it reads like a case study in how an accommodation process can break

down, and how a probationary firing can end up in federal court.

The worker was hired in March 2021 as a technical collection officer on a two-year probationary term, the complaint says, and assigned to a high-profile working group studying the causes of Havana Syndrome. In June 2021, back from surgery, she asked for a standing desk. The agency approved it the following month, according to the filing.

Then, the complaint alleges, things shifted. Her first-line supervisor told colleagues she would "no longer participate or support the WG" - the Havana Syndrome working group - the filing says. Later that month came a Letter of Counseling citing "unprofessional behavior, not following communication protocols, and failing to complete and participate in specific tasks," along with a reassignment to an office in Reston, Virginia. The worker replied that she couldn't medically handle the roughly 45-minute commute.

One point HR teams will notice: the complaint says a scheduled Interactive Accommodation Process meeting was cancelled by the supervisor as unnecessary. The interactive process - the back-and-forth an employer is expected to run once an accommodation is requested - is often where these disputes are decided.

The friction continued, according to the filing. The worker alleges she was told, by email and without explanation, "This is a failure to follow instructions." The complaint also says a major who helped staff affected by health incidents recalled that, as the worker tried to explain she couldn't meet a deadline because of her physical symptoms, the supervisor "basically said," "I don't care. You know, you're at work, you can figure it out."

In November 2021, the worker suffered a traumatic brain injury suspected to stem from an Anomalous Health Incident, the filing states. Weeks later, according to the complaint, a senior manager sent Human Resources a memo recommending her termination. The agency let her go on January 25, 2022.

The suit brings two claims under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: disability discrimination and retaliation. The retaliation claim points to the closeness - in timing and substance - between her protected activity, which the complaint identifies as her accommodation requests, the interactive process and her EEO complaint, and the decision to end her employment.

At its core, the case turns on the interactive process and the sequence between protected activity and termination - the pressure points at the center of most accommodation and retaliation claims.

The allegations have not been tested, and no court has ruled. The complaint also notes that an EEOC Administrative Judge earlier found the agency not liable, a finding upheld on administrative appeal - the context against which this new suit is filed.

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