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ditions hard to bear.

Shakur Shabazz — a four year employee — was fired in September 2010 for arriving late, soon after an injury caused doctors to put him on a light work schedule and managers had given him a flexible schedule, he says.

Steve Murray — a 12-year employee — was fired in July 2010 after management told him he wasn't doing a good enough job on a position he wasn't fully trained to accomplish.

Lawrence Willis — a four-year employee — says he was fired for "no call, no show" in May 2009 when he was sick. He says he did call in to report his absence that day.

The Skanner News was unable to speak with the fourth employee.

Stacey Krum, a spokesperson for Starbucks, says they "certainly deny the allegations" of disparate treatment or wrongful firing.

"Mr. Shabazz' complaint was the first and only indication of any such concerns at the plant," wrote Krum in an email response to The Skanner News' inquiry. "We take this issue very seriously and are cooperating in the investigation. We are confident that the evidence will show that the actions involving Mr. Shabazz and others individuals he has named were made for legitimate, performance-related reasons."

On Light Duty

Shabazz — like Willis — said his troubles began when he "challenged the company's policies" regarding his constant shift changes.

"I got hired the same day as a Caucasian man and I got changed regularly to swing, graveyard and day shift," he said.

In the month before he was fired, Shabazz said he began having severe spasms and pain in his foot — a foot that had nearly been severed when a forklift fell on it back in 1979. He visited two different doctors, both of which recommended he be put on "light duty." He was to work no more than 6 hours a day, according to a note from his doctor, although he said he was still put on duty that kept him on his feet.

In addition, he says he was not allowed to take his prescription pain medication during the day.

"So I'd take it at night," he said. "One night, I overslept because of that. I don't normally take medication ... it kind of overwhelmed me."

The week before, Shabazz — says managers had told him he could be flexible when coming to work. But on Monday morning, he was fired for arriving slightly past 9 a.m., despite calling in.

The 12-Year Veteran

Murray was hired on Oct. 16, 1998 in the shipping department and said his troubles began when he asked one manager to sit in on his weekly meetings with his direct supervisor. He said he wasn't "comfortable" with her had feared she'd misrepresent his concerns during the meetings. His request was never granted.

On Dec. 17, 2009, Murray called in sick. The next day he showed up, he got a write-up. They told him there was a single order left in the in-box when he left his last shift — an order he said was not there on Dec. 16.

"I tried to explain to (the manager) that the order wasn't there when I left," he said. "In all the years I've been there, I'd never heard of anyone else being treated with such harshness."

Then in May of 2010, Murray was told he

Shabazz — like Willis — said his troubles began when he 'challenged the company's policies'

was to engage in mandatory cross-training on a job in a different part of the warehouse. Because of the previous write-up, he said he was not eligible for the .

Murray said he was given "no support that was meaningful on the new position." Others put on "cross duty" were not assigned full-time to their positions and he says White workers were not given mandatory cross-training.

He said he was fired when managers told him he wasn't suitable for the new position — a position he did not want to fill. He had been told he could not make more than three mistakes in a month — however minor — or be fired.

"We can't comment on Mr. Murray's performance, why he was moved into another role or why he was separated," Krum said. "His supervisor met with him regularly to ensure that he was being given the appropriate resources and training to succeed."



Shakur Shabazz

The No Call No Show That Wasn't

Willis says his troubles also began when he started questioning procedures and policies during meetings that were designed for such a purpose. According to Krum, Starbucks has an "open door" policy for such ideas.

"Most of my issues came in meetings," he said. "They'd say they were trying to empower us ... but when we brought issues to them ... it seems like they always stuffed them under the rug."

When he was fired for his "no call, no show," that he denies happened, he said he applied for unemployment and was granted it by the state, until Starbucks appealed the decision. He said he didn't have the funds to

Starbucks says they maintain resources for employees to report concerns and mismanagement

pay for either the appeal fee or to mail and produce copies of his records. He is now being forced to pay back more than \$5,447 he received in unemployment insurance compensation that he says was used to pay bills and other living expenses.

Starbucks says they maintain resources

for employees to report concerns and mismanagement.

"In addition to the various hotlines and other resources for partners to report concerns, including anonymously, we survey our partners regularly throughout the company," according to Krum. "All partners at Tazo had the opportunity to respond to an anonymous survey last year. ... As far as we know, neither Mr. Shabazz nor any other individual at the plant has raised this as an issue. When our partners raise complaints we promptly investigate and seek to resolve their concerns."

Investigation

BOLI spokesperson Bob Estabrook says an investigation into a complaint of employment discrimination can take anywhere from 5 months to a year, with lots of variables. Many cases will be dropped by complainants before they reach a conclusion, for a variety of reasons, he says.

After an investigator completes their investigation, the file is given to a compliance manager, who reviews the case and makes a determination. The file — if a complaint is deemed to have validity — is then moved to the Administrative Law Process, which resembles a civil or criminal court. That decision is presented to the BOLI commissioner, who signs off on the final order of judgment.

BOLI investigates about 2,000 complaints a year, most are labor-related.

Wired

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Corp., a public interest, communications engineering and consulting firm, spoke to the Broadband Strategic Planning group from her office in Maryland, using Skype video conferencing.

"Providing this utility and planning to meet the community need is a core government function," Hovis said. "What I see are significant national efforts in our competitor nations, particularly in Asia, but also in Europe, to deploy next generation technologies..."

The United States is lagging behind, she said. China has more fiber to home connections than the USA, for example, while in New Zealand 90 percent of homes and businesses already are wired for high speed Internet. France, England, Japan, Australia and many other countries also have forged ahead with national, government-led plans.

"We must remember that we are educating our children for jobs that don't yet exist, to use technologies that haven't yet been invented to solve problems that we don't yet

know are problems," she said.

"If we don't have the technologies and the platform to do this, we are putting ourselves and our children at a terrible disadvantage."

Already an Infrastructure

Portland several years ago took up a full broadband effort which collapsed due to the economy, but not before installing mile upon mile of fiber-optic cable that runs under city streets. These cables constitute the infrastructure needed to deliver high-speed Internet.

Wireless connections can't work alone; they need to be backed up by these powerful fiber cables. Having them already in place is an advantage that rural Oregon and Washington and many other communities across the country simply do not have.

The commercial telecommunications companies that control our high speed

Internet access have had little motivation to expand their services to rural areas or high poverty urban neighborhoods. Currently 15 percent of Portland residents don't have a choice of Internet provider.

"The first goal I have in this planning

'We must remember that we are educating our children for jobs that don't yet exist'

process is what we can do to create competition," said Mary Beth Henry, second in command at the City of Portland's Office of Cable Communications and Franchise Management. "Without competition you don't have a market and you don't have choice."

Perhaps one of the most intriguing ideas is that universal broadband could save government, business and private citizens a lot of money. How?

"What if we had robust, affordable broadband, so everyone could telecommute one day a week," Henry suggests. "You wouldn't have to build so many roads. You would put less stress on TriMet. We could reduce carbon emissions and make progress toward our sustainability goals."

Hovis said one study looked at how telecommuting like this would affect Seattle. It found that noxious gas and emissions would be reduced by 595,000 kg a year.

And the National Broadband Plan estimates that using the Internet for health checks and record keeping will save us \$700 billion over 15 — 25 years.

Coming next week: *Broadband Access Part 2.*