LAW360 Employment Authority

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Union, Airline Evade Sanctions For Now In Pilot Arbitration

By **Emily Brill**

Law360 (May 15, 2026, 3:17 PM EDT) -- An Alaska federal judge won't hold a cargo airline and union in contempt for refusing to schedule an arbitration hearing on behalf of a pilot who the judge ruled was owed one, but she will sanction them if they don't schedule it within six months, she said.

In an **order issued Thursday**, U.S. District Judge Sharon Gleason said she can't hold the Teamsters and Northern Air Cargo LLC in contempt of court now because she didn't explicitly order them to schedule an arbitration hearing when she ruled in October that fired pilot Jeremy Wood was entitled to one. The judge will sanction them, though, if they don't schedule it "within 180 days of the date of this order."

"Given that contempt requires, at a minimum, a specific and definite court order, the court finds that the absence of such specificity and directiveness in the October 16 order precludes a finding of contempt," Judge Gleason said.

The judge **ruled Oct. 16** that the Railway Labor Act gives workers like Wood an individual right to pursue arbitration against their employers. Therefore, even though the Teamsters had refused to advance Wood's firing grievance against Northern Air Cargo to arbitration, Wood still had a right to access arbitration, the judge said. Her ruling reiterated her conclusions from a **January 2025 order** in which she denied the Teamsters' and airline's motions to dismiss Wood's suit.

After she handed down her Oct. 16 ruling, however, Northern Air Cargo and the Teamsters did not promptly schedule an arbitration hearing for Wood, he argued in an Oct. 31 motion, seeking to hold the airline and union in contempt of court.

"The court has ordered defendants to make all arrangements necessary for a system board to be convened and to schedule a hearing before the system board to hear plaintiff's grievance," Wood said. "NAC has expressly refused to comply, and the union defendants have not responded, thereby confirming that defendants are disobeying a specific and definite court order and intend to continue to do so."

Wood also asked Judge Gleason to specify that he is allowed to select his own attorney for the arbitration hearing. She did so in Thursday's order, saying, "To ensure meaningful access to his statutory right to arbitration, Mr. Wood is entitled to select his own counsel."

Wood's lawsuit against the airline and union dates to 2024. He argued that after the airline fired him in 2022, he had a right to take his challenge to the dismissal to arbitration and that the airline and union deprived him of that right. Judge Gleason sided with him in the suit last year.

Representatives of the parties did not immediately respond to requests for comment Friday.

Wood is represented by Sarah E. Josephson of Jermain Dunnagan & Owens PC and by Lee Seham and Mark Meeker of Seham Seham Meltz & Petersen LLP.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Teamsters Local 769 are represented by Sarah E. Derry of Barnard Iglitzin & Lavitt LLP and by D. Marcus Braswell Jr. and by Veronica A. Ucros Leon of Sugarman Susskind Braswell & Herrera PA. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters is also represented in-house by Emily Pantoja.

Northern Air Cargo LLC is represented by Connor Smith of Stoel Rives LLP and by Sarah Pierce Wimberly of FordHarrison LLP.

The case is Wood v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters et al., case number 3:24-cv-00053, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska.

--Additional reporting by Katherine Smith. Editing by Lief Nielsen.

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