

Akron Beacon Journal

COURTS

Town Tavern owner files defamation lawsuits against 2 over posts alleging mistreatment



Bryce Buyakie

Akron Beacon Journal

Published 6:02 a.m. ET Oct. 31, 2024 | Updated 12:13 p.m. ET Oct. 31, 2024

A prominent Summit County restaurateur is suing two people who he says defamed him in social media posts and ruined his businesses by publicly accusing him of false allegations including misconduct and sexual assault.

James House, 48, the owner of the Town Tavern in Green, Montrose Town Tavern in Copley and Sunrise Social in Uniontown, filed two separate lawsuits in Summit and Stark counties.

In the suits, he acknowledged public accusations made against him by the two subjects of the lawsuits. The allegations included that he sexually harassed and sexually assaulted his employees, harassed underage employees and engaged in fraudulent activity in one or more charities.

House denied these allegations and accused two individuals of driving what he described as a "smear campaign."

This legal action is the latest in an ongoing public fight between House, "The Dirty 330" Facebook page and the father of a former Sunrise Social employee.

What do the lawsuits allege?

The first lawsuit, filed in Summit County Common Pleas Court and assigned to Judge Jennifer Towell, names Sean Carroll of Plain Township as the defendant. Carroll is the creator of and a contributor to "The Dirty 330," a publicly viewable Facebook page with 28,000 followers.

In the lawsuit, House accused Carroll of "making false and defamatory statements" and of directing readers to spread misinformation, boycott House's businesses and encourage his employees to quit.

A second lawsuit that was originally filed in Summit County was transferred to Stark County Common Pleas Judge Chryssa Hartnett. In that suit, House accuses Dustin Halsey of Lake Township, the father of a Sunrise Social employee, of manipulating text messages between House and his employees to put him "in the worst possible light" before posting them on Facebook.

Attorney Andrew Stebbins, representing House, said the actions of both men resulted in House's employees quitting, a decline in customers, a ruined public and professional image and a slew of people waiting to pursue claims against him.

"The gossip site being used to destroy Mr. House's reputation is far from 'journalism' as the Defendants would have you believe," Stebbins wrote in an email. "Despite the Defendants insistence on doing so, Mr. House is not interested in trying these cases through the press or social media. Mr. House looks forward to all the facts coming out and to present his side of the story through the proper legal channels."

Carroll and Halsey denied the lawsuits' allegations.

Halsey's attorney, Frank Mazgaj, told the Akron Beacon Journal that none of the text messages were altered.

"Those are his words. The evidence will establish that the conduct of Mr. Halsey's daughter complained of ... is accurate," Mazgaj wrote in an email. "Mr. Halsey simply stood up for his daughter and will continue to do so."

Carroll, represented by attorney Peter Pattakos, argued in a court filing that third parties provided the information posted on "The Dirty 330" while some information was found in the public record.

"None of the statements at issue in this lawsuit are remotely defamatory. They are all true statements, accurate summaries of information about Mr. House and his conduct," Pattakos said. "People like Mr. House who own businesses patronized by the public should know that their actions will be subject to public scrutiny."

What is James House seeking in damages?

House is seeking over \$25,000 for each lawsuit for a combined total of more than \$50,000.

He requests that the courts declare the statements by Carroll and Halsey as false and defamatory, prohibit them from creating or publishing online content about him and order them to remove all posts about House.

Bryce Buyakie covers courts and public safety for the Beacon Journal. He can be reached by email at bbuyakie@gannett.com or on X, formerly known as Twitter, [@bryce_buyakie](https://twitter.com/bryce_buyakie).