

Former Black Associate Files Discrimination Lawsuit Against Troutman Pepper Hamilton Sanders



A Black former associate at Troutman Pepper Hamilton Sanders, a prominent U.S. law firm, has filed a lawsuit in a Washington, D.C. federal court, alleging discrimination and wrongful termination. Gita Sankano, the plaintiff, asserts that she was mistreated throughout her tenure and was fired in November in apparent retaliation for raising concerns about her treatment within the firm.

Allegations of Discrimination and Retaliation

Sankano, a University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law graduate, joined Pepper Hamilton's financial services practice group in 2018, which was later merged with Troutman Sanders. She claims to have been the only Black attorney in the D.C. office then. According to her complaint, a pattern of discrimination began early in her career, with a partner allegedly manipulating her billable hours and excluding her from associate training.

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Retaliation Following Internal Complaint

The lawsuit details an incident in August where Sankano clashed with partner Matthew Bowsher over credit for a housing deal. Bowsher's "outrageously demeaning, dehumanizing, and demoralizing email" response prompted Sankano to file a discrimination complaint with the firm's human resources department. Despite her efforts, an investigation concluded that no discrimination had occurred.

Firm's Response and Plaintiff's Stand

Troutman Pepper responded to the lawsuit by stating that Sankano's termination was based on legitimate, non-discriminatory reasons for her performance. Sankano, however, insists that she is taking legal action to shed light on the discrimination faced by Black female attorneys at the firm and Black professionals in general.

Legal Landscape and Larger Context

The legal landscape has seen increased discrimination claims against large law firms, particularly from women and attorneys of color. Most such cases are settled or dismissed before trial. Nevertheless, a federal jury trial is currently ongoing in Manhattan in a racial discrimination lawsuit against Davis Polk & Wardwell, brought by a Black associate fired in 2019.

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Seeking Damages and Injunction

Sankano, who had reportedly received positive performance reviews and feedback throughout her years with the firm, is seeking damages and an injunction against Troutman Pepper. The injunction aims to compel the firm to take measures to prevent discrimination within its ranks.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.