

# Ernst & Young hit with new sexual harassment claim

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A former partner in Ernst & Young's real estate advisory business has accused the accounting and consultancy firm of sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation, the second such complaint by one of its partners this year.

Karen Ward alleges in a complaint to the New York Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that during her five-year tenure at EY she was subjected to crude harassment, excluded from business discussions, paid "hundreds of thousands of dollars" less than her male counterparts — and was ultimately sacked in August this year when she persisted in complaining about the discriminatory behaviour.

The accusations come on the heels of an EEOC [complaint](#) from Jessica Casucci, an EY partner who claims several colleagues witnessed her being lifted up and sexually harassed by a partner. The colleagues did not intervene and the firm did not act on her accusations, according to Ms Casucci's complaint.

EY and Ms Casucci have subsequently reached a settlement. The senior partner who was the focus of Ms Casucci's allegations has been fired, and she has left the firm.

Ms Ward alleges that other senior members of the Transaction Real Estate group — including her first supervisor there, who was ultimately fired — made crassly sexual comments about her appearance, regularly took clients to strip clubs, and subjected other female employees to crude treatment.

When Ms Ward complained in writing about this and other behaviour, the complaint alleges, she was moved to the investment banking group. She was the sole female partner in that unit, as she had been in the previous one, which she argues is emblematic of a discriminatory environment at the firm as a whole.

After the transfer, the complaint states, members of the Transaction Real Estate team tried to pull clients and deals away from Ms Ward's unit, despite lacking the brokers' licences required to do so, a violation of securities laws. After the head of her former unit told her she was "being perceived as a bitch", Ms Ward's employment was terminated in August.

EY, in a statement, wrote that Ms Ward "was separated from EY following the firm's decision to shut down the small real estate investment banking advisory practice she led for three years", and that an investigation by an independent law firm had found her allegations to be unsubstantiated.

The statement went on to say: “Despite the firm’s full support, Ward failed to close a single transaction in the period she led the group.”

Ms Ward, a graduate of Stanford and Wharton business school who had previously worked at Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, claims that she was responsible for generating \$50m in revenue for Ernst & Young during her time there. Her lawyers, Wigdor LLP, have responded that the EY statement that she failed to close transactions “is flat out false”.

EEOC complaints are a standard legal preliminary to employer lawsuits or arbitration where discrimination is alleged.