

Morgan Stanley Banker Fired After Maternity Leave Writes CEO

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Sonali Basak and Max Abelson

(Bloomberg) -- A woman who says she was fired from Morgan Stanley without explanation 22 days after maternity leave wrote an open letter to the bank's chief asking to be released from binding arbitration, so she can sue the firm.

Chau Pham, a former vice president on a foreign-exchange sales team, filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, urging it to investigate Morgan Stanley's treatment of women, according to her attorney, Jeanne Christensen at Wigdor LLP.

Morgan Stanley "is committed to a workplace that is supportive of working mothers" and does not tolerate discrimination, a bank spokesman said. "The firm has policies and procedures in place to underpin that support, and those were followed in this matter."

The 24-page complaint alleges that Pham received her first negative performance review after her pregnancy became known, and that managers permanently shifted some of her client accounts to colleagues during her leave. After she returned, her breaks to pump breast milk became a topic of conversation among male coworkers, with one manager asking her repeatedly, "What's wrong with formula?" according to the complaint.

In her letter, Pham asked Chief Executive Officer James Gorman to "do the right thing" and let her litigate claims in open court. "You recently said that Morgan Stanley is 'not where we want to be, but we're making progress,'" she wrote him. "Forcing female employees to pursue discrimination claims in secrecy is not 'making progress.'"

Pham was fired on Sept. 18, one day after she was to begin arriving at work after 7 a.m. so that she could drop her baby off at daycare, according to her complaint. During her exit, she pressed a manager and a human resources representative for an explanation, but received none, according to the document.

Some of her former clients were later told she was let go because of firm-wide reductions, but to her knowledge she was the only person on her region's sales team to be ousted, according to the complaint.

The #MeToo movement has argued that mandatory employee arbitration helps keep details of worker complaints quiet. After pressure last year, Google, Facebook Inc. and Uber Technologies Inc. announced they'll allow employees to take claims of sexual harassment to court, despite arbitration agreements. The biggest U.S. banks, which have always been run by men, haven't announced anything like that.

(Updates with bank comment in third paragraph. An earlier version of the story corrected

spelling of Pham's name.)

--With assistance from Katia Porzecanski and Jordyn Holman.