

Goldman Slapped With Discrimination Suit By Gay Former Vice President

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A former vice president at Goldman Sachs has filed a lawsuit against the firm alleging that he was fired after he complained to Goldman's employee relations team that he was being discriminated against for being openly gay.

William Jarrad Littleton, who worked at Goldman Sachs for eight years, most recently as vice president on the specialty solutions team at the firm, filed the suit Wednesday in New York State's Supreme Court.

Littleton is seeking a judgment that Goldman Sachs violated the New York State Human Rights Law and a similar New York City law, and he is also seeking monetary damages against the firm and two former supervisors. The former supervisors — Rachel Schnoll, who is the head of the U.S. product strategy group at the firm, and Sirion Skulpone, who is the head of the specialty solutions team — are also named as defendants in the complaint.

"We're trying to hold Goldman accountable," said Littleton's attorney, David Gottlieb, a partner at Wigdor LLP, by phone on Wednesday. "What that means is doing what we need to do to make sure that no one else has to go through what Mr. Littleton had to go through."

Littleton also alleged that Goldman "attempts to hold itself out — presumably for public relations purposes" as creating an LGBTQ-friendly environment for employees, but "the reality is that the bank does little more than provide lip-service" to LGBTQ diversity, according to the complaint.

"Goldman Sachs has a sustained and proven commitment to diversity, and we are proud of the vibrant and diverse LGBTQ community at the firm," Patrick Scanlan, a spokesperson for Goldman, said via email Wednesday. "We strongly encourage all of our employees to bring their authentic selves to work, because it makes us a better firm. This suit is without merit and we plan to defend ourselves against these baseless claims."

Littleton alleged that fellow employees discriminated against him several times in recent years, according to the complaint.

For instance, he was allegedly excluded from a client call in 2014 because he "sounded too gay." After Littleton learned about this, he contacted his supervisor, Skulpone, who was on maternity leave at the time, he alleged in the complaint. Skulpone's alleged response was simply, "that sucks," the suit said.

After returning from maternity leave, Skulpone told Littleton that she would alert Goldman's employee relations team to the issue, because it would "look bad" if she did not do something, rather than out of any sense of ethical obligation, the complaint alleged. The team asked Littleton if he wanted to act, but he decided against it for fear of retaliation, the complaint said.

Additionally, following New York City's LGBT Pride parade in June 2015, Littleton took the Monday off from work for a personal day, the suit said. In a meeting that day, Schnoll allegedly said: "Oh, Will's not in? He must be hungover from pride festivities," according to the complaint. When Littleton heard about this comment, he was "humiliated," according to the complaint.

In May 2016, Skulpone allegedly shared data and figures that were not yet finalized to impress a partner, the suit said. Littleton allegedly expressed his concerns with Skulpone about prematurely sharing the data, which could have been inaccurate, the suit said. Tensions arose between the two, according to the suit, and at a meeting where Littleton tried to clear the air by saying he wasn't trying to give her a hard time, she allegedly responded: "What's wrong with you? Do you act this way because you're gay?"

Finally, in May 2018, the suit alleges that Schnoll looked at the way Littleton was dressed and said: "You look so Miami today." The complaint called this "a thinly veiled alternative to simply telling Mr. Littleton that he 'looked like a gay Latino.'"

Following that comment, Littleton went to employee relations and told the team there that "he felt discriminated against on the basis of his sexual orientation, was subject to a hostile work environment and was marginalized by the leadership on his team," the suit said. He told employee relations that during this time, his compensation, which was overseen in large part by Skulpone and Schnoll, had decreased despite his promotions, the complaint alleged.

The employee relations representative allegedly talked to both Skulpone and Schnoll about these concerns, but they denied making comments about his orientation, the suit said. Employee relations then allegedly closed the complaint, calling it "resolved."

Just months later, in November 2018, Littleton had his annual evaluation. He allegedly received "outstanding" scores from his feedback providers who were not his direct supervisors. Skulpone and Schnoll allegedly called his performance "inconsistent," however, despite previously positive performance reviews from the two, the complaint said. They also allegedly said that "judgment and communication have also resulted in personality conflicts that have occurred with concerning frequency," according to the complaint.

Following the review, the two allegedly informed Littleton that he was being fired due to "performance issues," the suit said.

Following his termination, Littleton allegedly met with Martin Chavez, the firm's former chief financial officer and current global co-head of the securities division, who had been a mentor to Littleton. According to the complaint, Chavez allegedly apologized "over and over again" to Littleton and shared his own experiences with homophobia and discrimination when he was promoted to the firm's management committee.

While Littleton has since been able to find employment at another bank, he wants Goldman to take some responsibility for their actions in this case, according to Gottlieb. The firm has roughly 30 days to respond in court to the complaint, Gottlieb said.