

Ex-Goldman Analyst Links Firing To Homophobia Complaints

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By **Braden Campbell**

Law360 (June 5, 2019, 3:58 PM EDT) -- A gay ex-Goldman Sachs analyst hit the finance giant with a New York state suit Wednesday alleging he was fired for complaining about homophobic comments, including his boss' asking him "Do you act this way because you're gay?" following a disagreement.

William Jarrad Littleton alleges the firm fired him last year despite years of stellar performance reviews, accusing it of violating New York job discrimination law by allowing an atmosphere intolerant of LGBTQ workers and canning him after he mustered the courage to speak up.

Among other things, Littleton was excluded from a call because the moderator thought he sounded "too gay," was told by his boss he looked "so Miami" in what he took as an attack on his sexuality and his ethnicity, and was mocked as hungover when he was out the day after the New York City LGBT Pride March, he alleges.

"Despite years of 'outstanding' performance reviews filled with near-endless praise regarding Mr. Littleton's bright future at the bank, he was abruptly fired by those who he complained engaged in discriminatory conduct," the suit alleges.

Littleton's suit paints homophobia as the rule on Wall Street, which he says "has long been a place where people have been hesitant to openly express their sexual orientation for fear of backlash." Goldman is no exception to this rule, he said.

While the bank portrays itself as LGBTQ-friendly, it "does little more than provide lip service to LGBTQ diversity," Littleton alleges. He points to the firm's November 2018 news release announcing its partner class for the year. The firm boasted that its class was 26% female and 6% black, both of which it touted as record highs, according to Littleton. But the release was "completely silent on LGBTQ inclusion," and mentions that only 1% of Goldman partners identify as LGBTQ, he said.

Littleton's personal experience bears out this alleged frostiness toward LGBTQ workers, he says in this complaint. While he quickly rose through the ranks and earned accolades from colleagues after joining the bank in 2010, he also faced discrimination based on his sexuality, he claims. This includes his being excluded from a 2014 conference call, which he claims he learned was because he "sounds too gay."

When Littleton complained to his boss, Sirion Skulpone, who was then on maternity leave, she “provided no support other than to say, in sum and substance: “that sucks,”” he said. The next year, another boss, Rachel Schnoll, chalked up his absence following the 2015 Pride march to his being “hungover from pride festivities,” Littleton alleges. In May 2018, despite Littleton not wearing anything out of the ordinary, Schnoll told him “you look so Miami today,” he alleges. He interpreted this as “a thinly veiled alternative” to saying he “looked like a gay Latino.” He names Schnoll and Skulpone as defendants.

Littleton was initially put off from complaining by Skulpone’s seeming indifference to the “sounds too gay” comment, but was moved to speak up in May 2018 after speaking to a mentor in Goldman’s LGBT Network, he says. But his complaints went nowhere and ultimately led to his firing after Schnoll and Skulpone raised “performance issues” in his 2018 evaluation despite his winning rave reviews in prior years, Littleton said.

Littleton’s attorney, David Gottlieb of Wigdor LLP, said the suit shows Wall Street and Goldman have botched a responsibility to “create an environment that is inclusive and accepting of LGBTQ+ employees.”

“We intend to send a message to all businesses in New York, and Goldman in particular, that this type of treatment towards LGBTQ+ employees will not be tolerated,” he said.

A Goldman spokesperson said Wednesday the firm “has a sustained and proven commitment to diversity” and called Littletons’ suit “without merit.”

“We strongly encourage all of our employees to bring their authentic selves to work, because it makes us a better firm,” the spokesperson said, touting the “vibrant and diverse LGBTQ community at the firm.”

The suit includes claims of discrimination and retaliation under the New York State and New York City Human Rights Laws, which bar bias based on sexual orientation.

Littleton is represented by Douglas Wigdor, David Gottlieb and Julia Elmaleh-Sachs of Wigdor LLP.

Attorney information for Goldman was not available Wednesday.

The case is William Jarrad Littleton v. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. et al, before the Supreme Court of New York for New York County. The case number was not available Wednesday.

--Editing by John Campbell