

Ex-Goldman Sachs VP Claims He Was Fired for Raising Concerns About Anti-Gay Bias

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PM

A former Goldman Sachs vice president filed suit in New York State Supreme Court in Manhattan on Wednesday morning, claiming he was terminated from the investment bank in retaliation for raising formal concerns about discrimination he says he faced for being gay.

William Littleton claims he spent eight years with the company, rising to become one of the most visible senior LGBTQ leaders at the bank. Yet despite Goldman's publicly stated commitments to diversity, Littleton said in the complaint that the culture at the investment bank remains inhospitable to LGBTQ employees.

In a statement, Wigdor LLP partner David Gottlieb, who is representing Littleton, said Wall Street, in general, continues to struggle to create an inclusive environment for the LGBTQ community.

"Mr. Littleton's experiences demonstrate that Goldman Sachs in particular has failed to embrace this important responsibility," Gottlieb said. "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."

According to the complaint, Littleton was continuously promoted with praise from his superiors during his eight years at the bank. His efforts resulted in award-winning industry-recognized work, and placed billions in investment assets under his team's care. Additionally, Littleton says he was a leader inside the company's own internal support network for LGBTQ employees, becoming, according to the complaint, "one of the most proud, active and vocal LGBTQ leaders at Goldman throughout his tenure."

Despite all this, Littleton claims he was regularly subjected to homophobic statements and behavior from colleagues—and that he felt reporting the incidents would only make things worse.

For example, after he expressed concern to his manager about her decision to share non-final figures and information about a portfolio he worked on to a more senior partner at Goldman Sachs, Littleton claims his manager responded to his concerns by asking, "What's wrong with you? Do you act this way because you're gay?"

In May 2018, at the advice of a mentor at the investment bank, Littleton says he decided to approach Goldman Sachs' employee relations to tell them 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.

Littleton says the ER representative he talked with did little to help him, other than taking his complaints to his superiors, who then denied his allegations. The matter, from ER's perspective, was then closed, according to Littleton.

Littleton claims that, within months, his relationship with his superiors soured. Whereas he'd received substantial praise during evaluations up to that point, both his managers now included "significant unwarranted criticism" in his annual review. At the end of the process, Littleton was told he was being terminated over supposed performance issues that manifested during the previous year. The only issues that manifested, he claims, was "finally having the courage to pursue his complaints of discrimination internally with Goldman's ER."

In a statement provided by a company spokesman, Goldman Sachs said the investment bank "has a sustained and proven commitment to diversity, and we are proud of the vibrant and diverse LGBTQ community at the firm."

"We strongly encourage all of our employees to bring their authentic selves to work, because it makes us a better firm," the company said. "This suit is without merit and we plan to defend ourselves against these baseless claims."

Littleton's complaint brings six claims against Goldman Sachs under the state and New York City's human rights laws.