

MetLife Is Sued Over Alleged Gender Pay Gap, Sexist Comments

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Erik Larson

A former MetLife Inc. executive claims she suffered years of gender-based pay discrimination and harassment from members of the insurer's top leadership team and that she was fired after complaining about a lack of diversity.

Mona Moazzaz, a former chief administrative officer who joined MetLife in 2012, sued the company Wednesday in federal court in New York. Moazzaz said she was wrongfully terminated in May after writing a strategy document about the company's diversity problems and poor financial performance.

The former executive alleges that at one point, she was told, "if you want to be promoted, you need to choose between being pretty and being smart because men can't put you in both boxes," according to the lawsuit.

The complaint says Moazzaz was paid \$525,000 less than an unidentified man who performed the same job and had fewer responsibilities. The suit also claims she was paid between \$100,000 and \$370,000 less than eight other men who performed less complex work.

"We believe the allegations are without merit and plan to defend this matter vigorously," Randy Clerihue, a MetLife spokesman, said in an email.

Moazzaz said she wrote a "CEO candidate strategy" document in late 2018 for a candidate seeking to succeed Steven Kandarian as chief executive officer. The document highlighted the alleged diversity gaps as well as what the suit describes as poor capital-market performance, financial discipline and regulatory scrutiny.

"Shortly after MetLife's current CEO, Michel Khalaf, took on the role, Ms. Moazzaz was terminated," her lawyer said in an emailed statement.

The complaint cites a November 2017 email in which Moazzaz complained to Martin Lippert, the company's former global head of technology and operations, about her failed effort to get a pay raise and be promoted to executive vice president after taking on additional responsibilities from three new departments.

"Multiple female associates have approached me over the past few months conveying how happy they are that I'm a woman at the front with the rest of the leadership team -- they have no idea what I'm really going through and how the vision they're seeing isn't the reality

they would hope for," she wrote, according to the complaint.

The former executive alleges that she was ultimately denied her promotion to executive vice president because she was deemed to be "too mean," while her male colleagues were "rewarded for being aggressive."