

MetLife Hit With Gender Bias, Pay Suit From Former Exec

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Law360 (November 13, 2019, 8:34 PM EST) -- A former senior vice president at MetLife filed a gender discrimination suit against the insurer in New York federal court Wednesday, claiming she was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars less than men performing equal or less-demanding work and was wrongfully terminated.

In her complaint against MetLife Inc. and certain executives, Mona Moazzaz says that she was subjected to discriminatory pay practices and hostility toward her gender, among other things, even though she had "outstanding performance" at the company.

For instance, one of her male colleagues was paid \$525,000 more than Moazzaz even though she performed the same job as him with additional responsibilities, the complaint says. And the head of human resources for the company's global technology and operations department called her a "bitch" without facing any repercussions, according to the suit.

"It is completely unacceptable for companies to pay women hundreds of thousands of dollars less than men who do the same or less work," Michael J. Willemin, an attorney for Moazzaz, said in a statement. "Yet, according to the complaint, that is exactly what MetLife did with respect to Ms. Moazzaz."

"This is unfortunately unsurprising given that MetLife has been given an 'F' with respect to its gender pay gap and, as alleged, high level members of leadership are permitted to make discriminatory comments about women in the workplace with impunity," he added.

Moazzaz further alleges that she was denied a promotion for the stated reason that she was "too mean, condescending and shouts," and that a chief HR officer discriminatorily investigated her and overrode her manager's recommended performance rating to give her a lower rating that resulted in a reduced bonus.

Additionally, when she was directed to undergo six months of leadership training, a life coach hired to work with Moazzaz told her that if she wanted to be promoted, she needed to "choose between being pretty and being smart because men can't put you in both boxes" and also instructed her to "wear less makeup" and "dress conservatively," the suit said.

Ultimately, Moazzaz was fired in May after she authored a CEO candidate strategy for one of the two people in the running for the position that "exposed many major gaps in diversity at MetLife," according to the complaint.

According to the suit, she was "unceremoniously terminated without notice and escorted out of the building" just eight business days after the other candidate for the position took over as CEO. The complaint says that it wasn't meant to list all the discriminatory conduct Moazzaz faced, but rather included "some of the most blatant examples."

A representative for MetLife told Law360 in a statement Wednesday that they "believe the allegations are without merit and plan to defend this matter vigorously." Moazzaz worked as the chief administrative officer for the company's global technology and operations department, according to the company.

Moazzaz is represented by Douglas H. Wigdor, Michael J. Willemin and Taylor J. Crabill of Wigdor LLP.

Counsel information for MetLife was not yet available Wednesday.

The case is Moazzaz v. MetLife Inc. et al., case number 1:19-cv-10531, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.