

Ex-employee sues Nicole Miller fashion for anti-pregnancy bias

BY Stephen Rex Brown

nydailynews.com

Fashion designer Nicole Miller is embroiled in a lawsuit from a former employee contending she was discriminated against over her pregnancy.

Pregnancy is not in fashion at Nicole Miller, a lawsuit charges.

A former high-level employee of the Midtown-based women's fashion line alleges that its eponymous president took an "unsympathetic and truly reprehensible disposition" toward a pregnant staffer.

Wendy Simchi-Levi, 34, says in the suit filed in Manhattan Supreme Court that she was an employee in good standing, reporting directly to Miller, until she revealed she was 20 weeks pregnant with twins in September.

*(Andy Kropa/Andy Kropa
/Invision/AP)*

During the meeting, Miller noted that Simchi-Levi had been hired in July, the suit claims.

"Oh, so you knew you were pregnant when you interviewed?" Miller asked, according to papers.

"The disdain in Ms. Miller's voice was impossible to miss," the suit adds.

"You won't want to come back to work after having twins," Miller allegedly said.

The statement "evinces Ms. Miller's undeniable discriminatory animus," papers charge.

Following that conversation, Miller ostracized Simchi-Levi, even refusing to address her directly during meetings, papers claim.

"Nicole hates you," Simchi-Levi's co-workers allegedly told her.

Plaintiff Wendy Simchi-Levi gave birth Jan. 1 — and 30 days later, she received a letter telling her she'd been fired due to "ongoing performance issues from last year."

Soon, Simchi-Levi's office was moved, making it harder for her to do her job coordinating the Nicole Miller brand with clothing manufacturers, she claims.

In November, Miller called Simchi-Levi "a f---ing a--hole" and hung up on her due to delays over a new line of sweaters, papers charge.

Simchi-Levi said the delays were Miller's fault and that the designer was "perhaps blinded by her sheer contempt for Ms. Simchi-Levi."

Plaintiff Wendy Simchi-Levi gave birth Jan. 1 — and 30 days later, she received a letter telling her she'd been fired due to "ongoing performance issues from last year."

The next month, as complications forced Simchi-Levi into a long stay at a hospital, the company "coerced" her to take unpaid maternity leave though she wanted to continue working, the suit says.

Simchi-Levi, of E. 31st St., gave birth Jan. 1 — and 30 days later, she received a letter telling her she'd been fired due to "ongoing performance issues from last year."

“We are sensitive to the fact that the timing of this transition may be inconvenient for you on a personal level,” the letter noted.

Simchi-Levi seeks damages to be determined at trial.

“As a successful fashion designer and businesswoman herself, it is disgraceful that Ms. Miller would treat a dedicated and loyal employee who was pregnant with such disdain,” Simchi Levi’s attorney Douglas Wigdor said. An email to Nicole Miller’s press office was not returned.

