

Ernst & Young Partner Alleges Sexual Harassment at Firm

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By Mary Childs

April 18, 2018

A partner at Ernst & Young has filed a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, alleging harassment and retaliation at the professional services firm.

Jessica Casucci, who has worked at EY for 14 years and was elevated to partner in 2014, alleges that a fellow partner assaulted her in June 2015, at Jellyrolls, a restaurant at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Fla., where EY employees had convened for a conference.

The complaint alleges that when she went over to say hello to three colleagues, one of them, John Martinkat, “wrapped his arms around Ms. Casucci’s lower body and lifted her up over his shoulder.... Mr. Martinkat groped and squeezed Ms. Casucci’s rear end with both hands. Ms. Casucci struggled to escape from Mr. Martinkat, but was unable to do so.”

When he put her down, “he pulled her into his body and grabbed and aggressively squeezed her breasts,” saying he wanted to have sex with her and “incorrectly” claiming the interest was mutual and that it would be “the best night [of her] life.” This occurred in front of two other EY partners, “who stood by and did nothing,” the complaint contends. Martinkat then sent a barrage of calls, texts, and emails, trying to draw her to his hotel room, the complaint alleges.

According to the complaint, Casucci decided to report the incident after she heard allegations that the same man had assaulted another woman, also at a conference. But, the complaint says, despite EY’s head of diversity and inclusiveness telling Casucci to “trust the firm,” Casucci later found that she either didn’t make a record of her account or it was scrubbed. To avoid Martinkat, Casucci changed tracks, having to “completely reinvent” her career and rebuild a book of business, while Martinkat’s career was unaffected, the complaint says.

The stress of the situation resulted in Casucci passing out, persistently losing sleep, and starting to see a therapist, according to the complaint. Martinkat wasn’t the only alleged offender; other partners asked Casucci if she was wearing underwear, the complaint alleges.

EY said in a statement:

“EY is committed to a workplace free of discrimination and harassment of any kind. New information was brought to our attention on April 13, 2018, which we are thoroughly investigating. The individual who is the subject of the charge has been placed on administrative leave pending the completion of our investigation. We take all allegations of sexual harassment seriously. Once we conclude our investigation, strong disciplinary actions will be taken against anyone we determine to have violated our policies and/or our Code of Conduct.”

Neither Martinkat nor EY’s head of diversity immediately responded to requests for comment.

With this complaint, EY joins businesses like Wynn Resorts and NBC News that have had to reckon with complaints from female employees. Casucci is represented by Wigdor, which is also representing women in actions against Steve Cohen's Point72 Asset Management and TCW Group. Point72 denies the allegations, and TCW says its complainant was fired for cause.

“In this day and age, when a woman shows the courage to stand up and complain about physical sexual harassment at work, one would expect her complaint to be treated with the utmost care and urgency,” Wigdor partner Michael Willemin said in an email. “Sadly, Ernst & Young, the third largest accounting firm in the world, did not treat Ms. Casucci’s complaint this way, and her career was seriously damaged as a result. We intend to send a message that there are consequences for companies who choose to protect male harassers rather than female victims of sexual harassment.”

Over the past year, industries from media and entertainment to financial services and politics have reckoned with the actions, alleged or proven, of some of their most powerful actors. Spurred by media reports and lawsuits, industries are rooting out employees who harass, assault, and discriminate against others, particularly women.

The finance industry often has conferences in destinations like Las Vegas and Barcelona, where most attendees do not live. Hotel stays can be particularly fraught for women, who may face advances. Many say they wish not to be labeled a squeaky wheel, instead just enduring the humiliations and discrimination, or seeking a new job at a new firm, or leaving the industry entirely.