

# Outgoing EY Partner Accuses Firm Of Sexism In EEOC Charge

[law360.com/employment/articles/1085599/outgoing-ey-partner-accuses-firm-of-sexism-in-eeoc-charge](https://www.law360.com/employment/articles/1085599/outgoing-ey-partner-accuses-firm-of-sexism-in-eeoc-charge)

By **Braden Campbell**

Law360 (September 24, 2018, 5:46 PM EDT) -- Ernst & Young is a boys' club in which women are objectified, demeaned and denied the pay and opportunities given to men, an outgoing partner who says she's being fired for speaking out told the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Monday.

The outgoing partner said women at Ernst & Young are "underpaid, under-promoted and subjected to sexual harassment and all forms of disparate treatment." (Getty)

Karen Ward, who said she will be fired in October after she fell short of an "impossible" revenue goal the firm set for her, alleged in an EEOC charge that male EY leaders frequented strip clubs with clients and made sexual remarks toward and about women. One male supervisor made comments to Ward about her body, while other co-workers bragged about angling their seats so they could ogle a female colleague and another openly discussed pole-dancing with a client, Ward claims.

Ward further claims EY paid her hundreds of thousands of dollars less than male peers for the same work, transferred her to another group when she complained and sabotaged her work in this new division by denying her support.

"Women at EY are underpaid, under-promoted and subjected to sexual harassment and all forms of disparate treatment," Ward said. "When women at EY complain about this discriminatory treatment, and ask to be treated with dignity and respect, they are retaliated against and marginalized even further."

Ward claims she complained several times to higher-ups, but the firm did not address her concerns. Instead, the firm transferred her real estate capital markets business to its Ernst & Young Capital Advisors group, where it denied her the support she needed to build a successful practice, Ward said. Ward continued to complain about similar sexism and other illegal activities in EYCA and was told she was "being perceived as a bitch," she said.

Ward alleges the firm and its male executives started pushing her out in 2017. She claims she was excluded from meetings and email chains, and that male colleagues otherwise did not support her. She claims the firm set her up to fail by giving her a lofty \$3.25 million revenue target for fiscal year 2018, and in August told her she would soon be fired because her business didn't make enough money.

Ward's charge comes five months after a tax partner told the EEOC that a male colleague **groped her** and that she had to switch teams to avoid him, hurting her career. That partner **settled** with EY in May and has left the company.

Wigdor LLP partner Michael Willemin, who represents both women, accused EY of retaliating against Ward for being “courageous enough to stand up for [her] rights and complain.”

“It is particularly offensive in this day and age for a company to attempt to bully and intimidate women into staying silent,” he said in a statement. “Ms. Ward will not stay silent.”

An EEOC charge is a precursor to a lawsuit that notifies businesses of alleged discrimination. The agency will investigate Ward’s charge and take action against EY or give Ward permission to sue under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

EY on Monday described Ward’s claims as “unfounded and baseless” and said it fired her because she didn’t make the company enough money. The firm said it is shutting down “the small real estate investment banking advisory practice that she led for three years” and claims she didn’t close a single transaction as its leader “despite the firm’s full support.”

Ward challenged this explanation for her firing in the charge, claiming she earned the firm about \$50 million in fees over the last five years. She also claims the firm is not ending her real estate capital markets business, but giving it to men.

Ward is represented by Michael Willemin of Wigdor LLP.

Attorney information for EY was not available Monday.

--Additional reporting by Vin Gurrieri and Dave Simpson. Editing by Connor Relyea.