


Avon is 'a company run by men': Former exec files lawsuit, claims she was fired after revealing high-risk pregnancy

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Adrianna Barrionuevo

A former Avon executive claims she was fired less than a month into her new job after she asked to work from home for a week, under doctor's orders, because of a high-risk pregnancy.

In the suit, filed on Oct. 3 in New York City, Caroline Ruiz says that three weeks after starting her new job, in January, she was rushed to the emergency room after experiencing heavy bleeding. It was there that she learned she was pregnant and that the pregnancy was high-risk, with "an exceedingly high likelihood that she would suffer a miscarriage," according to the suit.

Ruiz used her paid time off to take a few days to rest after her scare but was advised by her doctor to "not travel," and he "recommended that she remain on bedrest" for another few days. The mom-to-be explained her high-risk pregnancy to Avon's human resources department and provided a doctor's note with her request to work remotely.

According to the suit, "only one day after Plaintiff informed Avon of her pregnancy," Ruiz was "bombarded" with "fabricated 'performance issues'" by her male supervisor. At the end of the meeting, he allegedly told Ruiz, "Your health isn't my concern, but your performance is." Her request to work remotely was then denied via email — even though Avon employees, including her supervisor, "routinely worked from home or away from the office," according to the suit.

On the Monday that Ruiz was supposed to have begun her five-day bedrest, she commuted to Avon's Manhattan office, and in doing so, she "put her health and her pregnancy at risk," the complaint says. She was called into a meeting with senior Avon exec Jacklyn Marcus and abruptly fired for "performance deficiencies."

The suit is troubling, considering the company's "'champion of women' mantra," as the suit describes it, noting that "the company 'for women' actually is a company run by men." It also claims that most executive leaders are "a group of white men," adding, "For a company that bases its entire brand on female empowerment, the fact that a mere 27% of the Management Committee is female is outrageous." According to the Avon website, eight out of 12 members of the executive leadership team are men, including the CEO.

An Avon spokesperson released a statement to Yahoo Lifestyle, saying, "The Company denies Ms. Ruiz-Katz's claims of discrimination. It is company policy to not comment on pending litigation."

The spokesperson added, “We are very proud of our reputation as ‘the company for women’ and our strong and ongoing commitment to empowering women since our founding over 130 years ago. As a preeminent employer of women, with a workforce comprised of more than two-thirds women, we understand the particular needs working mothers have, and we are committed to supporting them before, during, and after maternity leave. Our dedication to women’s advancement in the workplace includes ensuring work-life balance, a comprehensive benefits package that provides incremental women’s health features, and a generous maternity leave.”

Meanwhile, Ruiz’s attorney, Jeanne M. Christensen, says in a statement to Yahoo Lifestyle, “Avon boasts that it is a company dedicated to empowering women. But as alleged in the complaint, Avon abhorrently fired our client simply because she disclosed her pregnancy. Such overt discrimination is intolerable by any company but is even more disturbing when the company is Avon — an alleged leader for women. What will the all-male leadership at Avon do to right this wrong against their own female employee?”