

Finance Firm Bramshill Sued For Alleged Sex Bias

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By **Braden Campbell**

Law360 (September 24, 2019, 3:44 PM EDT) -- Asset manager Bramshill Investments fired one of its only female workers for complaining about potential rules violations and the company's allegedly sexist culture, before trying to intimidate her into keeping quiet, according to a sex discrimination suit filed Tuesday in New York federal court.

Ashley Pullen accused the firm of retaliation by firing her months into her tenure as an executive director, saying she was punished for pointing out potential U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission violations and protesting the firm's "boys' club" culture. Pullen's complaint also alleges that the firm fired her for trumped-up violations of its cybersecurity rules and that the firm threatened bogus counterclaims to dissuade her from suing.

"[Bramshill counsel] Gordon & Rees' sudden and menacing demands and letters in and of themselves illustrate the true motive behind Bramshill's purported justification for terminating Ms. Pullen — to intimidate a legitimate victim of discrimination," Pullen said.

Pullen's complaint, which she filed in the Southern District of New York, paints Bramshill as a hotbed of sexism where male leaders sideline the firm's few women staffers and treat them as eye candy.

Pullen claims Bramshill hired her this spring following her swift ascent through the finance industry. Almost immediately, the firm began mistreating her because of her sex, Pullen claims. Among other things, she alleges the firm gave a male executive director more opportunities to woo investors, sent that same exec to a convention she had asked to attend, and brushed off her complaints that this colleague was poaching her investors. Pullen made "explicit complaints" regarding this gender discrimination, only to have her concerns ignored and be assigned a role planning "events," allegedly because she's a woman, she said.

The ex-exec also claims she was "dramatically underpaid" compared to the male counterpart and that she was subjected to a hostile work environment based on her sex. Pullen claims she was the victim of or witness to several sexist acts, including firm CEO Stephen Selver leering at her and touting her looks to an investor at a Bermuda retreat. Pullen also said she overheard another male employee saying a colleague's "new boobs look great" after that colleague underwent a procedure on her breasts.

In late July, Pullen raised concerns that the firm planned to share preliminary performance estimates with prospective clients in violation of SEC rules, only to be told she was being "aggressive" and "causing tension," she claims. The firm would not have used such terminology toward a man who raised these concerns, and when Pullen claimed as much, the firm fired her, she alleges.

Bramshill ostensibly fired Pullen for sending sensitive work documents to her personal email account, according to her suit. But this was a smokescreen for firing her because of her repeated complaints, Pullen says, noting "numerous" male colleagues sent internal documents to her personal email account. She continues to get sensitive firm emails on her personal account, the latest coming Sept. 16, she claims.

And the firm's offenses didn't end with her firing, Pullen claims. She alleges the firm dragged its feet in responding to her post-firing legal demands before suddenly sending her a Sept. 18 letter warning she would be accused of stealing confidential firm documents if she filed suit. Pullen's attorneys, Michael Willemin and Douglas Wigdor of Wigdor LLP, called this a transparent attempt to frighten her.

"This type of intimidating conduct is precisely why so many women are afraid to speak out against discrimination, and if companies who act like this are not held accountable, women will continue to suffer in silence," they said in a joint statement.

The suit accuses Bramshill of violating New Jersey, New York and federal discrimination law.

Bramshill did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

Pullen is represented by Douglas Wigdor, Michael Willemin and Julia Elmaleh-Sachs of Wigdor LLP.

Attorney information for Bramshill was not immediately available.

The case is Ashley Pullen v. Bramshill Investments, case number 1:19-cv-08843, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

--Editing by Daniel King.

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