

Fired Exec at Wall Street Investment Firm Claims She Was Unfairly Labeled 'Aggressive'

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PM

Quoting former U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan on the discriminatory bind an employer puts a woman in by labeling her as too “aggressive,” a former executive director of a Wall Street investment firm on Tuesday sued the company for gender discrimination, claiming it had labeled her as just that before pushing her out.

Ashley Pullen, a former executive director at Bramshill Investments, an alternative asset manager with about \$2.5 billion under management, also lays out a detailed retaliation claim against Bramshill in her [32-page complaint](#) launched in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

She claims she was fired for wholly pretextual, retaliatory reasons, just one week after she told Bramshill CEO Stephen Selver, who’d allegedly told her that she was a source of “tension,” that “the only reason this tension exists is because you are running the marketing team [at Bramshill, of which she was a part] like a boys’ club.”

“Instead of addressing Ms. Pullen’s complaint of gender discrimination, Mr. Selver neglected to address this issue and retaliated against Plaintiff by terminating her employment a mere seven days later,” states the complaint, drafted and filed by the Wigdor law firm in Manhattan on behalf of Pullen.

The central pretextual reason given for Pullen’s Aug. 7 firing, the complaint says, was that she had emailed business-related documents to a personal email address.

But according to the complaint, Bramshill “had no rule prohibiting employees from forwarding business-related documents to their personal email accounts to facilitate the employee working remotely.” And, “in fact, Bramshill even allowed employees to send substantive business related emails—as opposed to the mere forwarding of a document for the employee’s Bramshill related use—from personal email accounts as long as the emails were not retained on a public email server such as Google or Yahoo, which Ms. Pullen’s email was not,” the complaint adds.

The complaint also states that several male employees at Bramshill “sent over 30 emails to Plaintiff’s personal email” during her four-to-five-month tenure with the firm, which began in March 2019, “without repercussion or further investigation.”

“It is inconceivable that the Firm terminated Ms. Pullen for sending emails to her personal email when the Firm’s male employees, including its own CCO, sent business-related emails of a higher level of confidentiality to Ms. Pullen’s personal email,” the complaint adds.

The complaint repeatedly quotes former Justice Brennan’s case-law language on a workplace unfairly labeling a woman employee as “aggressive” while also maintaining an aggressive workplace environment to underscore the double-standard it claims existed in Pullen’s case.

Citing “the landmark” Supreme Court opinion in *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, 490 U.S. 228 (1989), Pullen and her lawyers at Wigdor twice include a pullout of the key Brennan quote: “An employer who objects to aggressiveness in women but whose positions require this trait puts women in an intolerable and impermissible Catch 22: out of a job if they behave aggressively and out of a job if they do not. Title VII [federal anti-discrimination law] lifts women out of this bind.”

And in their complaint—signed by founding Wigdor partner Douglas Wigdor, as well as by partner Michael Willemin and associate Julia Elmaleh-Sachs—the former Bramshill executive director and her lawyers allege that, because Pullen competed for work while also pointing out inter-office gender inequities in work distribution, she was labeled and somewhat cast aside.

Matthew Gallo, an associate at Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani is counsel for Bramshill, and he could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

At the heart of the complaint, Pullen and Wigdor allege that she was continually “being marginalized and passed over for opportunities in favor of her male colleagues; particularly Mr. [John] Wasilewski—who had been hired for exact the same role as Plaintiff” shortly before she joined the firm.

In just one example, Pullen and her attorneys claim that “Mr. Selver requested that Plaintiff and Mr. Wasilewski submit investor names for their respective potential investor coverage lists,” but “dubiously, in submitting this list, Mr. Selver gave no parameters to Mr. Wasilewski but requested that Ms. Pullen only submit names of investors within the U.S. and Canada.”

Moreover, “Mr. Selver also allowed Mr. Wasilewski to submit a limitless number of investors but requested that Ms. Pullen keep her investor list to approximately 150 names,” the complaint says, adding that “ultimately, Ms. Pullen was entitled to coverage of only 159 investors, almost 100 fewer investors than Mr. Wasilewski was authorized to cover,” and “of course, this would have a significant negative impact on Ms. Pullen’s ability to retain investors and, in turn, earn compensation.”

When Pullen began complaining—by telling Selver in June, for example, “that her inequitable coverage of investors relative to her colleague Mr. Wasilewski was ‘a matter of gender

discrimination,”—she was ignored, according to the allegations. Then, later, she was told she was a source of “tension” and that she was “aggressive,” and eventually she was fired, the suit claims.

Pullen’s action bring claims under the federal Equal Pay Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, New York Executive Law §§ 290 et seq., the New York City Human Rights Law and New Jersey Law Against Discrimination.

It also alleges that, in another act of retaliation, earlier this month “Bramshill threatened to sue [Pullen] in a transparent attempt to silence Ms. Pullen and prevent her from seeking to vindicate her rights under the anti-harassment and discrimination laws.”