

USA Today Harassed and Fired Pregnant Employee as She Grieved for Infant Son's Death: Lawsuit

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Supervisors in *USA Today's* advertising sales department harassed and ultimately fired a newly pregnant employee, berating her for “a negative attitude” as she grieved for an infant son who had died eight months earlier, a federal lawsuit alleges.

In a complaint filed Thursday in the Southern District of New York, former New York-based digital ad sales director Serena Bhaduri claimed that two of her supervisors—Estee Cross and Anna Riddle, along with co-defendants *USA Today* and the national newspaper's parent company Gannett—violated federal and state employment laws in their alleged mistreatment of her.

“In August 2019,” the lawsuit alleges, “*USA Today* fired Ms. Bhaduri, a top-performing digital sales director, after she disclosed her pregnancy. *USA Today* engaged in this horrific discrimination knowing that earlier this year Ms. Bhaduri suffered a personal tragedy that no parent should have to endure. Ms. Bhaduri and her family welcomed a baby boy in November 2018. Tragically, her son died in January 2019.”

The complaint continues: “In February 2019, despite this awful loss, Ms. Bhaduri returned to her job in digital sales at *USA Today*. Soon after her return, Ms. Bhaduri's direct supervisor, Estee Cross, cruelly accused Ms. Bhaduri of having a ‘negative’ attitude that she claimed caused her coworkers to suffer ‘low morale.’ Suggesting that Ms. Bhaduri appeared to act more negative, as compared to how she acted before the death of her son, or that this was a problem for supervisors at *USA Today* is appalling.

“Of course, there was no suggestion that Ms. Bhaduri was underperforming because her sales remained at an exceptionally high level,” the lawsuit adds. “*USA Today* had no right to impose a term or condition of employment that required Ms. Bhaduri to uplift the morale of her coworkers because of Ms. Bhaduri's grief and loss.”

Neither Gannett nor GateHouse Media—the newspaper company with which Gannett officially merged on Tuesday in a \$1.2-billion transaction, creating a chain of more than 260 local dailies—responded to an email requesting comment on the lawsuit.

The complaint—which demands unspecified monetary compensation for lost income, “mental anguish” and other damages—comes at a moment when the freshly combined media company is expected to announce substantial layoffs to address what chief executive Michael Reed called “inefficiencies.”

Bhaduri's attorneys at the law firm Wigdor LLP stated in a press release that after she returned to work, "horrifically, when Ms. Bhaduri learned she was pregnant again several months later, *USA Today* wasted no time and fired her within days. Worse, as alleged, *USA Today* did the same thing to another pregnant female on her team less than a month after firing Ms. Bhaduri. Such blatant discrimination is inexcusable."