


In-House Attorney at MTA Bridges and Tunnels Alleges Workplace Violence by Superior

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By Dan Clark

A Black in-house attorney at the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority Bridges and Tunnels sued her employer Tuesday, alleging that she was assaulted by a white male supervisor and retaliated against after reporting it.

Kellie Walker, who has worked at the TBTA since 2018 handling employment issues, filed her lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York against her supervisor, Victor Muallem, labor relations vice president Sharon Gallo-Kotcher, TBTA and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Her claims include discrimination and harassment, retaliation, an equal protection violation of the 14th amendment, and discrimination.

Walker alleges that beginning in the spring of 2019, her working relationship with Muallem began to change and that he held some animosity towards her. She alleges that Muallem would send unwarranted criticisms of her work in email and copied Gallo-Kotcher on those emails. She alleges that Muallem would belittle her in front of clients and during arbitration proceedings.

“Muallem’s aggressive behavior and yelling at Ms. Walker was meant to imply that he believed she was incompetent. It also shows that as a white male, he believed it was acceptable for him to subject a junior Black female employee to such horrific discrimination and humiliation,” the complaint alleges.

On Feb. 3, 2020, Walker alleges that Muallem struck Walker’s arm with the back of his hand during an arbitration proceeding.

The next day she submitted a workplace violence form to Gallo-Kotcher. At the end of February 2020, Walker retained counsel and sent a letter of representation to Gallo-Kotcher.

Walker alleges that Gallo-Kotcher started a campaign of retaliation against her at that point, by excessively monitoring when she would clock in and out of work and requiring her to work from the office in November 2020, while others in the department were still working from home because of the coronavirus pandemic. Muallem is still working at the TBTA in a supervisory role.

Walker is represented by Jeanne Christensen, a partner at Wigdor. In a statement Tuesday, Christensen said: “Kellie Walker deserves justice. The MTA should not be allowed to sit by and do nothing when a white male supervisor is credibly accused of assaulting a Black female

employee, not to mention in the presence of multiple witnesses.”

Christensen said Walker is still working at the TBTA. She said the alleged assault was reported to the police, but police have not contacted Walker to advance the investigation.

“We look forward to holding the MTA accountable for this appalling and discriminatory conduct and hope this lawsuit sends a loud message that no woman should ever have to live in fear of being in the same room as her male boss,” Christensen said.

Walker is also represented by Widgor associates Lindsay Goldbrum and David Schmutzer.

“We will vigorously contest these claims but will not litigate lawsuits in the press,” Tim Minton, MTA communications director, said in a statement.

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