


Lawsuit: White MTA Supervisor Physically Assaulted Black Attorney During Arbitration

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A Black attorney who works at an affiliate agency of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has filed a lawsuit after a white supervisor allegedly physically assaulted her and the MTA allegedly did nothing about it.

In a lawsuit filed this week in the Southern District of New York, 50-year-old Kellie Walker claims her direct supervisor at MTA Bridges and Tunnels, 60-year-old Victor Muallem, subjected her to "aggressive and violent behavior," including the incident in which Muallem allegedly hit Walker during an arbitration proceeding with seven witnesses.

According to the lawsuit, Walker has worked for the agency since 2018 as an attorney and she allegedly started experiencing animosity from Muallem in the spring of 2019, including unwarranted criticisms and belittling comments in front of others.

The alleged physical assault occurred on Feb. 3, 2020, according to the complaint. Walker said Muallem hit her arm with the back of his hand. Walker said she reported the incident to the police and filed a complaint to her employers but nothing was done. The lawsuit also alleged that MTA's labor relations vice president Sharon Gallo-Kotcher retaliated against Walker by monitoring when she would clock in and out.

The lawsuit filed against Muallem, Gallo-Kotcher and the MTA asserted multiple allegations including race and gender discrimination and retaliation in violation of federal, state and/or city laws, gender-motivated violence, assault and battery, according to Walker's attorneys.

"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," Walker's representative, Jeanne Christensen, said in a statement. "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."

Tim Minton, MTA Communications Director, said in a response to the lawsuit that the agency will contest the claims.

"We will vigorously contest these claims but will not litigate lawsuits in the press," Minton said.