

# Harvard Biz School Group Backs Amazon Race Bias Suit

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More than 220 members of the Harvard Business School community came out Friday morning in support of an alumna suing retail giant Amazon for race discrimination she allegedly faces as a Black woman in the company's highest ranks.

In a letter addressed to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and Amazon Web Services CEO Andy Jassy, the community members praised Charlotte Newman's "courage, fortitude and leadership" in challenging the mistreatment, lack of representation and discrimination she says she has experienced at the retailer.

"Some of us have worked at Amazon. Some of us may work at Amazon in the future," the community members said in the letter. "But all of us hope that Amazon will use this moment to change."

Newman, a business development manager at Amazon Web Services, alleges she was hired at the retail giant in a lower-tier role than the one she sought despite her experience as an adviser to Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J.

In a **March 1 suit** filed in D.C. federal court, she claims other employees also face so-called down-leveling and are paid and promoted less than white workers. In addition to being subjected to a pay gap and racially offensive conduct, Newman also alleges she was sexually assaulted and harassed by a supervisor.

The Friday letter set out six recommendations for Amazon. The community members called on the company to review leveling, compensation and promotion practices globally and develop a new program to improve career development for women and minorities.

The letter urged Amazon to eliminate down-leveling and address similar issues that also threaten certain groups of workers. And it recommended improving safeguards for workers who report harassment or discrimination, as well as expanding a corporate leadership development and compensation board to include diversity, equity and inclusion issues.

The letter was published two days after Amazon released its diversity, equity and inclusion goals for 2021. The goals, listed in a Wednesday message from human resources Senior Vice President Beth Galetti, include requiring all employees to take inclusion training and retaining workers at similar rates across all demographics.

The company also plans to double the number of Black employees in executive roles and increase the number of women in top tech and science jobs by 30%, according to the message.

However, Lawrence Pearson, a partner at Wigdor LLP who represents Newman, said in a Friday statement that the goals "are sadly insufficient to address the company's alleged widespread discriminatory employment practices."

Pearson also praised the Harvard Business School community's letter, saying it "outlines concrete and actionable steps Amazon can take to create a more equitable and positive work environment, not just for Black employees but for all."

In a Friday statement, Newman urged Amazon leadership to act with "urgency and focus" on employees' concerns.

"Amazon has an opportunity to become a global leader in cultivating equitable pathways to success for all employees," she said. "I am grateful that fellow members of the Harvard Business School community decided to speak out and urge the company to do better by women and people of color."

In a Friday email, an Amazon spokesperson pointed Law360 toward a review of Amazon's 2020 compensation practices. That analysis found that women and men received equal pay and minorities earned roughly 99 cents for every dollar white workers made.

The spokesperson also said the company had investigated Newman's sexual harassment claim and fired her harasser.

"The investigation also resulted in corrective action and additional training requirements for those in her reporting line," the spokesperson said. "We also reviewed Ms. Newman's interview process, leveling and onboarding, and determined that she was properly placed in her role at the company."

Newman is represented by Douglas Wigdor and Lawrence Pearson of Wigdor LLP.

Amazon is represented by Grace Speights and Oluwaseun Familoni of Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP.

The case is Newman v. Amazon.com Inc. et al., case number 1:21-cv-00531, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.