

Seattle-area women among 5 suing Amazon, alleging racial, gender discrimination

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An Amazon human resources employee has filed a discrimination lawsuit against the company, contending she has data showing the company fires Black, Latino and Native American office workers more frequently and promotes them less often than their white counterparts.

The suit was one of five discrimination lawsuits filed Wednesday by current and former Amazon employees, including two from the Seattle area. The five workers, all women, allege the company fosters a culture in which they were sexually harassed, paid less than male peers, referred to with racial slurs and retaliated against.

“Women and employees of color at all levels of Amazon have had their complaints of harassment and discrimination brushed under the rug and met with retaliation for years,” said attorneys Larry Pearson and Jeanne Christensen, partners at high-profile firm Wigdor Law, which is representing the five women, in a statement. Wigdor is also representing Amazon Web Services (AWS) employee [Charlotte Newman in a racial and gender discrimination complaint against Amazon](#) filed earlier this year.

“Amazon can no longer dismiss abusive behavior and retaliation by white managers as mere anecdotes,” the statement said. “These are systemic problems, entrenched deep within the company and perpetuated by a human resources organization that treats employees who raise concerns as the problem.”

In a statement, Amazon portrayed the five complaints as unrelated to one another and not indicative of the company at large. Amazon spokesperson Jaci Anderson said the company is investigating the incidents at the heart of the lawsuits.

So far, Amazon has “found no evidence to support the allegations,” Anderson said. “Amazon works hard to foster a diverse, equitable and inclusive culture. We do not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any form, and employees are encouraged to raise concerns to any member of management or through an anonymous ethics hotline with no risk of retaliation.”

The lawsuits come amid increasing pressure on Amazon to hire, retain and promote more underrepresented people. At the company’s annual shareholder meeting next week, [investors will vote on two resolutions](#) urging the company to conduct civil rights, diversity and inclusion audits. Amazon has recommended votes against both the proposals, but shareholder-advisory firms [are recommending](#) investors approve one of the measures.

Last month, Amazon publicly pledged to begin hiring more women and Black employees in its corporate offices. Jeff Bezos, in his last letter to shareholders as Amazon's CEO, said his focus going forward will be on employees' well-being.

Both of the Seattle-area employees filing lawsuits contend they were retaliated against after they complained about a supervisor's allegedly inappropriate behavior.

Pearl Thomas, a human resources specialist at Amazon's Seattle headquarters who is Black, contends she was placed on a performance improvement plan after she complained about her manager's use of a racial slur.

Thomas, a former Miss Black Washington and local television host, said in the lawsuit that when she was recruited to join Amazon in 2020 after a two-decade career in human resources, she was offered a job title and salary several rungs below her actual job responsibilities.

Diana Cuervo, who relocated from New York last summer to work as a manager at Amazon's Everett warehouse, said in her suit that she was subjected to near-daily harassment from her manager on the basis of her Latin American heritage. When Cuervo complained to human resources about her supervisor's behavior — including his lack of response to a gas leak at the facility — she was terminated without explanation, she asserts in her suit. Amazon then asked her to repay her relocation costs and signing bonus.

The three other employees who lodged discrimination claims against Amazon Wednesday are Tiffany Gordwin, a Black human resources specialist in Arizona who alleges she was passed over for promotion in favor of less-qualified white men; Emily Sousa, an Asian warehouse shift manager based in Pennsylvania who says she has been subject to repeated sexual harassment and retaliation; and Cindy Warner, an AWS executive in California who was fired in April and alleges violations of equal-pay laws.

Gordwin's complaint includes some internal company retention data, which she can access in her role at Amazon. The data pertains to the 13,600 U.S. employees in Amazon's Global Delivery Services team — a sliver of Amazon's 950,000-person U.S. workforce. The data included in the suit suggests that in Gordwin's division, certain ethnic or racial groups working in Amazon's corporate offices are more likely to be fired than their white or Asian peers.

In 2018 and 2019, Black, Latino and Native American workers made up roughly 9% of mid- and entry-level U.S. corporate employees in the Global Delivery Services division, but made up nearly 15% of workers at that level who were terminated, according to the suit. One tier higher, minorities made up 9.8% of management-level corporate workers, but 24% of the roughly 54 terminations at that level in 2019.

Gordwin's lawsuit also alleges underrepresented minorities are promoted less frequently than their white peers — a complaint echoed in other discrimination suits filed against Amazon, including by Warner and Newman. The Global Delivery Services team didn't promote any Black, Latino or Native American employees to the relatively high-ranking director level in 2018, Gordwin's lawsuit notes.

Wigdor and Amazon declined to provide access to the full data referenced in the lawsuit.