Amazon plans to investigate discrimination within AWS after hundreds of employees sign petition

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Amazon says it plans to investigate allegations of discrimination and bias within its Amazon Web Services cloud computing unit after an employee petition criticizing the culture and seeking a probe garnered hundreds of signatures.

The petition, posted on an internal company website and seen by The Washington Post, alleges that AWS, and specifically the professional services group known as ProServe, has "an underlying culture of systemic discrimination, harassment, bullying and bias against women and under-represented groups."

The Post reported that more than 550 employees had signed the petition as of Thursday, calling for an independent probe of "employee concerns that there is a non-inclusive culture." They also seek the creation of an employee council to work with an external investigator.

Amazon confirmed to GeekWire on Friday the steps it is taking to address the matter. The company shared an email from new AWS CEO Adam Selipsky that was sent to the authors of the petition.

"I share your passion for ensuring that our workplace is inclusive and free of bias and unfair treatment," Selipsky wrote. "I can tell you we are committed to that outcome, as well as to specifically investigating any incident or practice that is inappropriate." (Read the full email at bottom.)

Selipsky took over AWS after the unit's longtime leader, Andy Jassy, took over as Amazon CEO on July 5 when Jeff Bezos stepped down. The petition was sent to Selipsky and Jassy on July 15, the Post said.

According to the Post, the petition cites a lawsuit filed in May by Cindy Warner, a gay executive in the ProServe business. Warner accused a manager of making homophobic comments and alleged she was fired in retaliation. The petition also refers to a LinkedIn post written last summer by Laudon Williams, a former employee of the group, who wrote that he left the company over concerns about gender and sexual-orientation discrimination, the Post reported.

Warner told the Post that "toxicity" is high within the ProServe unit, and that it is dominated by an "old boys club." She told the newspaper she hoped to help Amazon improve, but was instead cast aside. Warner also sent a letter to Jassy and Selipsky, which she published on

Medium on Friday, in which she told the two leaders that Amazon's "change in leadership invites reflection on where the company has fallen short in recent years while it aims to become 'Earth's Best Employer.'"

An Amazon spokesperson told GeekWire that the company conducted a thorough investigation of Warner's complaints and "found her allegations to be unsubstantiated."

Amazon also said it has taken actions to understand and assess team culture within the ProServe business, including the hiring of a woman-owned and led firm to investigate ProServe employees' concerns.

Here is the full email from Selipsky to the petition authors:

> Thank you for your thoughtful note on what is a very important topic. I share your passion for ensuring that our workplace is inclusive and free of bias and unfair treatment. I can tell you we are committed to that outcome, as well as to specifically investigating any incident or practice that is inappropriate. I understand you are aware that, given the nature of the concerns here, we have retained an outside firm to investigate and understand any inappropriate conduct that you or others may have experienced or witnessed. This firm is experienced and objective, and I personally will review their independent findings, which will help guide any further actions.
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> I know that you have been actively engaged in productive conversations on these issues with the AWS ID&E team, and I would encourage that to continue. Personally, I believe that frank and open discussion is really important.
>
> Thanks again for raising these concerns. We are all committed, as am I personally, to making sure we get this right.
>
> Adam