

Amazon pledges to investigate discrimination complaints after employee petition

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Amazon Web Services (AWS) CEO [Adam Selipsky](#) has launched an investigation into the business segment's culture after more than 550 employees signed a petition accusing the cloud-services division of tolerating racial and sexual discrimination and harassment.

The petition alleges “an underlying culture of systemic discrimination, harassment, bullying and bias against women and under-represented groups” within AWS's sales-related Professional Services organization, according to a copy of the petition seen by The Seattle Times. The petition also criticizes Amazon's mechanisms for investigating and resolving discrimination claims.

The Washington Post [first reported](#) on the petition and Selipsky's response.

Called ProServe internally, the Professional Services organization helps clients migrate digital components of their businesses off of their own servers — or those of a cloud competitor — and onto AWS.

The petition was prompted by recent criticism of the company by ex-ProServe workers — namely a [discrimination lawsuit](#) filed by former executive Cindy Warner and a [LinkedIn post](#) by former employee Laudon Williams — as well as media coverage of Amazon's treatment of employees in outlets including The Seattle Times, the petition's authors note.

Selipsky, a longtime AWS executive who returned to Amazon in May after a five-year stint leading Seattle data-visualization firm Tableau, told the petition's authors last week that AWS had hired an outside firm to dig into the employees' concerns, according to a copy of the email provided by Amazon.

The petition had asked Selipsky to approve the establishment of an employee council to work with the external investigator “to hold the company to account in how it responds to the investigation and any recommendations made, and to ensure the voice of employees is central to the review process.” The authors also requested Selipsky to present findings from the investigation by October 30.

In his message to the petition authors, Selipsky did not name the firm AWS had hired, commit to a timeline or respond to the call to form an employee task force.

Amazon spokesperson Jaci Anderson said in an email that AWS had hired the independent investigator before Selipsky received the petition on July 15.

The company is taking additional steps to respond to ProServe employees' concerns, Anderson added, including asking team leaders to work on a company-culture assessment, launching a women's mentoring program and providing diversity and inclusion trainings to executives.

The petition, created last month by current Amazon employees who did not include their names on the document, was posted on an internal survey site, [vote.Amazon](#). As of July 21, it had received 556 votes, according to an image of the petition website. On a separate page, 158 Amazon employees added their names to publicly show support for the petition, according to an image of the site seen by [The Seattle Times](#).

In his LinkedIn post, Williams said that managers with multiple human resources complaints against them continued to be promoted within ProServe. Warner's lawsuit echoed that assessment.

Warner alleged that she was fired in April after a manager who had derided her with sexist epithets was promoted to a position for which Warner believed she was more qualified. Her employment was terminated after she informed Amazon she intended to pursue a lawsuit, she alleges.

Anderson said Warner's allegations of discrimination were unsubstantiated, and her departure was unrelated to her subsequent lawsuit.

"Amazon does not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any form and any situation, and employees are encouraged to raise concerns to any member of management or through an anonymous ethics hotline with no risk of retaliation," Anderson said in an email. "When an incident is reported, we investigate and take proportionate action, up to and including termination."

The petitions' authors said some employees' experiences contradicted the company's assertions that it takes workplace discrimination complaints seriously.

Amazon has said "that the company 'doesn't condone harassment and discrimination,' and that claims investigated have been 'unsubstantiated,'" the petition authors wrote. In a typically Amazonian turn of phrase, they went on, "We are offering practical solutions to help understand why data and anecdotes appear to be misaligned."