

Major Lindsey & Africa 'Blackballed' Associate Who Sued Troutman, Suit Claims

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- The former Troutman Pepper associate who sued her former firm for alleged discrimination brought another suit against Major Lindsey & Africa for retaliation.
- The complaint filed this week includes screenshots of emails in which senior recruiters are discussing their refusal to work with the associate following her complaint against Troutman.

A former Troutman Pepper Hamilton Sanders associate is claiming global search firm Major, Lindsey & Africa terminated her job search in retaliation for the discrimination [suit she filed against Troutman Pepper](#), according to a complaint filed in Maryland federal court on Monday.

Gita Sankano, who sued Troutman Pepper in January, claimed Major Lindsey told its recruiters to refrain from working with her even as she was being considered as a candidate by another law firm. Sankano claims Major Lindsey retaliated against her after alleging that Troutman Pepper fired her after she filed a formal human resources complaint against a partner.

Sankano's latest complaint advances a single claim of retaliation against Major Lindsey and three of its senior recruiters. The complaint includes email exchanges between the recruiters in which they agreed to refuse to work with Sankano in the aftermath of her complaint against Troutman Pepper. A screenshot of the email exchange appears below this story.

"MLA's despicable conduct is a perfect example of why people of color continue to face abhorrent discrimination in the workplace and in society at large," stated Sankano's complaint. "Indeed, one of the most significant reasons that systemic race discrimination persists is because people who observe and experience it stay silent because they are afraid that they are going to suffer retaliation if they say anything."

Sankano said she filed the complaint to "blackball" Major Lindsey just as it allegedly "blackballed" her by refusing to place her after she initiated the court action against her former firm.

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"If MLA will not work with minorities who have the courage to speak out against discrimination, law firms and corporations should not work with MLA," stated her complaint.

Sankano is represented by Gregg Greenberg of Zipin, Amster & Greenberg and Michael Willemin of Wigdor LLP. Willemin, who is also representing Sankano in her action against Troutman Pepper, provided a statement to the media Tuesday.

"Anyone with common sense knows that the fear of retaliation is one of the major reasons that acts of discrimination and harassment are underreported and continue to persist in the workplace and society at large," Willemin said. "Individuals and companies that punish people for standing up against discrimination, like the defendants in this case, put the sad truth to that fear and are, in their own way, responsible for the prevalence of discrimination in this country. No law firm or company should want to work with an organization that operates like MLA did in this instance."

In an email response, a spokesperson for Major Lindsey reaffirmed the search company's commitment to diversity as a "core value."

“We pride ourselves on placing candidates at law firms without regard to race, sex, or any other protected characteristic,” the firm said via a spokesperson. “Therefore, we take Ms. Sankano’s allegations in this matter extremely seriously.”

The statement added that Major Lindsey “cannot control which candidates receive interviews or job offers from firms” because it doesn’t have a contractual relationship with its candidates.

“In our communications both internally and to Ms. Sankano, our aim was to offer our best professional advice and to convey a basic principle of our industry: that law firms may be wary of hiring someone who is suing another law firm,” the firm said. “For this reason, we intend to defend this matter vigorously.”

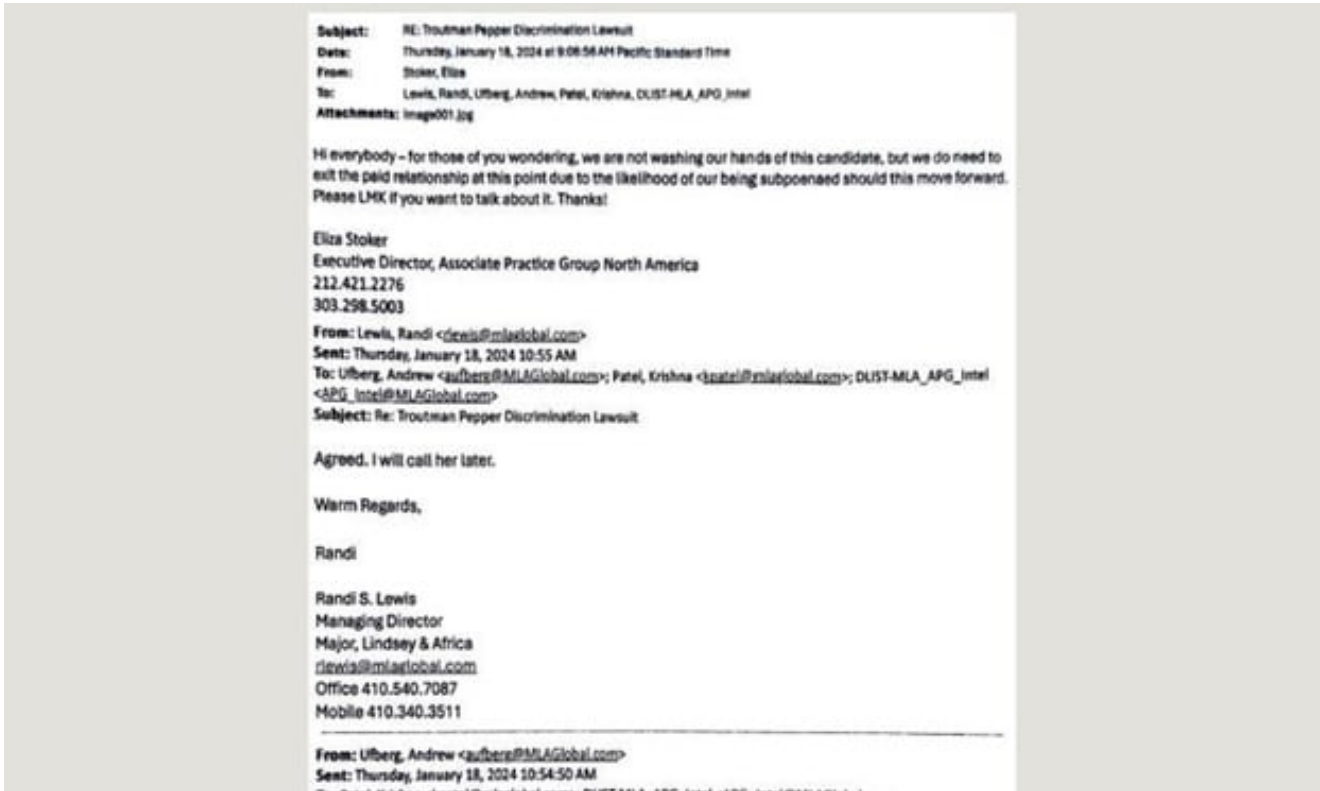
Sankano’s complaint on Monday, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland, names managing directors Randi Lewis and Andy Ufberg and associate practice group executive director Eliza Stoker as defendants along with Major Lindsey.

In emails following Sankano’s Jan. 17 complaint, Lewis, Ufberg and Stoker can be seen stating they will not work with Sankano because of her complaint. Stoker said in one email, “We are not washing our hands of this candidate, but we do need to exit the paid relationship at this point due to the likelihood of our being subpoenaed should this move forward.”

Sankano stated she learned that Major Lindsey uses the internal tracking system “Bullhorn” to keep records concerning its clients. In Sankano’s record, Lewis allegedly noted her discrimination suit against Troutman Pepper.

Reached by phone Tuesday, Willemin said Sankano’s lawyers sent Major Lindsey a litigation hold notice March 5. Within 48 hours, Lewis’ note and Sankano’s resume were deleted, according to the complaint.

The unwillingness to place Sankano was reportedly shared by Chima Okoli, a director of Major Lindsey’s associate practice group, who told Sankano he “would have loved to help her because she is a first-generation [attorney], like him, but he can’t because [MLA] doesn’t want its documents subpoenaed.”



Screenshot of email exchanges. From complaint.

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