

Recruiter Major Lindsey blackballed associate for suing law firm, showing 'bogus' commitment to diversity, suit alleges

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Trials & Litigation

By [Debra Cassens Weiss](#)

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A Black associate who sued a BigLaw firm for alleged discrimination and retaliation has now filed a second lawsuit claiming that legal recruiter Major, Lindsey & Africa blackballed her as a result. (Image from Shutterstock)

A Black associate who sued a BigLaw firm for alleged discrimination and retaliation has now filed a second lawsuit claiming that legal recruiter Major, Lindsey & Africa blackballed her as a result.

The [April 2 suit](#) by Gita F. Sankano says the recruiter has a “bogus” commitment to diversity, as evidenced by its “despicable conduct.” In fact, the suit says, Major Lindsey’s “commitment to diversity is so abysmal that when Ms. Sankano stood up to discrimination, she became persona non grata.”

The suit, filed in federal court for the District of Maryland, alleges retaliation in violation of Section 1981 of the Civil Rights Act, which bars racial discrimination in contracts. According to [Law360](#), the statute is also being used by conservative groups challenging diversity initiatives.

Sankano plans to add claims under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Maryland Human Relations Act after receiving a right to sue letter from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, according to the suit.

Sankano sued Troutman Pepper Hamilton Sanders for alleged discrimination [in January](#). In the new suit, Sankano claims that Randi Lewis, a managing director of Major Lindsey, tried to convince her that the claims against Troutman Pepper were without merit. Then, after Sankano sued, Lewis and another managing director, Andy Ufberg, refused to work with Sankano, the suit alleges.

Lewis had submitted Sankano’s materials to “Law Firm A” before she filed the suit. The day after the suit’s filing, Lewis told Sankano that the position is no longer available. Sankano says she knew that this was a lie because she had a pending interview with the law firm.

The suit also claims that the executive director of Major Lindsey’s associate practice group, Eliza Stoker, instructed the entire group not to work with Sankano. Stoker attributed the decision to the possibility of being subpoenaed, but that assertion is “completely absurd,” the suit says.

Sankano’s suit says an internal tracking system known as Bullhorn, which keeps notes and records on its clients, included in her record this comment from Lewis: “and she filed a discrimination lawsuit ... sigh.” The comment was deleted within 48 hours of receiving a notice of litigation hold from Sankano, the suit alleges, citing information and belief.

The suit was filed by lawyers for Wigdor and for Zipin, Amster & Greenberg.

[Reuters](#), [Bloomberg Law](#), [Law.com](#) and [Law360](#) have coverage.

Wigdor lawyer Michael J. Willemin released this statement: “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. 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.”

A Major Lindsey spokesperson told Law.com that the recruiting firm’s commitment to diversity is a core value, and it takes Sankano’s allegations “extremely seriously.”

“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. For this reason, we intend to defend this matter vigorously,” the statement said.

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