3 Former Employees Sue WeWork, Alleging Harassment, Discrimination and Retaliation

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Three former employees filed lawsuits against WeWork this week accusing the coworking company of racial discrimination, harassment and retaliation, among other alleged misconduct.

Two separate complaints filed Wednesday in the New York Supreme Court for the County of New York allege racial discrimination, sexual harassment by WeWork employees, "questionable" stock option practices, equal pay violations and retaliation. A third complaint, filed Thursday in the The United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, alleges sexual harassment, a hostile work environment and retaliatory termination.

The former employees, two of whom are Black, were hired between 2017 and 2019. One served as a diversity and inclusion program lead, another was a program manager and the third was a stock plan administrator. Each complaint alleges a work environment that turned a blind eye to discrimination and harassment, and a company that either fired or compelled employees to leave.

A WeWork spokesperson told Adweek the claims have "no merit," adding that the company "thoroughly investigates all reported complaints and takes remedial action if and when appropriate."

"WeWork has zero tolerance for discrimination or harassment of any kind," the spokesperson said. "We are committed to moving

the company forward while building an organization and culture of compliance, respect and integrity."

The spokesperson declined to say what WeWork's next steps will be with regard to the lawsuits.

Christopher Clermont, who is suing WeWork alleging racial discrimination, equal pay violations and retaliation, was hired in April 2018 to lead WeWork's diversity and inclusion program. Clermont's complaint alleges that after he raised concerns about the issues he was hired to address, including a lack of upward mobility for Black employees and diversity among leadership, he was subjected to a "campaign of harassment and retaliation designed to push him out of WeWork."

While excluded from planning for diversity initiatives, the suit claims, Clermont was asked to appear in promotional materials, blogs and photos for the company. Over several months, WeWork diminished his role, using him as a "poster child of a happy black WeWork employee" before eliminating his position in November 2019, according to the complaint.

Diane Allen, whom WeWork hired as a stock plan administrator in October 2017, is suing the company alleging racial discrimination, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, retaliation and equal pay violations. According to Wednesday's filing, a male WeWork employee allegedly sexually harassed Allen at a company summit in early 2018. Upon returning from the summit, Allen reported the incident to human resources, but HR took "no meaningful action," according to the complaint.

Allen also accuses WeWork in her lawsuit of unequal pay and misrepresenting the value of stock options to employees. When she raised concerns related to these issues, according to the complaint, management excluded her from meetings and isolated her within the company. In September 2019, Allen left the

company.

“Our clients and our office believe strongly in the claims against WeWork set forth in these complaints,” said attorney Seth Rafkin of the law firm Rafkin Esq. who is representing Allen and Clermont. “As the complaints make clear, there are important issues raised in these cases, and we believe our clients will be vindicated before a jury.”

Alexandria Fitzgerald, who served as a project manager for WeWork from March 2019 to April 2020, is suing WeWork and two former colleagues, Danny Duong and David Stiles, for alleged discrimination and retaliation. Fitzgerald’s suit accuses WeWork of violating the Family Medical Leave Act for allegedly firing her while she was on medical leave seeking treatment for anxiety and depression.

According to Fitzgerald’s complaint, Stiles, who served as a mentor in a supervisory role when Fitzgerald started at WeWork, consistently made sexually inappropriate comments about women and harassed her during a work trip. After bringing these issues to management and human resources, Fitzgerald alleges in the complaint, management retaliated by diminishing her role in a team restructuring. She was also required to work closely with Stiles despite repeated requests to be moved to another team, according to the filing.

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