

Amazon Launches Internal Investigation following Employee Complaints of Discrimination and Retaliation

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On Friday, July 23, 2021, [The Washington Post reported](#) that Amazon Web Services (“AWS”) launched an investigation into its workplace culture after over 550 current Amazon employees signed a petition urging the company to address “an underlying culture of systemic discrimination, harassment bullying and bias,” in its Professional Services business unit, known internally as ProServe.

The petition cites a lawsuit filed by Wigdor LLP client Cindy Warner, a former AWS executive who alleged that she was fired from her role in ProServe in retaliation for her internal complaints of gender discrimination.

In a letter [published on Medium](#), Ms. Warner implored Amazon CEO Andy Jassy and AWS CEO Adam Selipsky to take her former colleagues’ concerns seriously: “the petition circulating in ProServe shows that my experience at Amazon is not unique and is emblematic of much larger problems at the company... The fear and pain of women and other underrepresented groups in ProServe are real. These employees are crying out for help, and addressing this problem only helps the company in the long run.”

Wigdor LLP client Charlotte Newman made national headlines in March 2021 after she [filed a lawsuit](#) against Amazon claiming the company had a widespread practice of “down-leveling” women and people of color in its corporate offices and promoting them less than their white counterparts. The company’s practice of hiring employees at lower levels than their qualifications merit has had an especially severe effect on Black women at the company, as alleged in Ms. Newman’s lawsuit.

Months later, on May 19, 2021, Wigdor LLP filed [five more individual lawsuits](#) on behalf of women who each claimed that they were mistreated by primarily white, male managers at Amazon and retaliated against for reporting discrimination. The women range in age from 23 to 64 and worked in various Amazon corporate offices and warehouses across the United States.

Ms. Warner alleged in her lawsuit that she, too, was down-leveled by being offered a lower-level role than the one she was initially recruited for and was qualified for. She further alleged that white men were treated favorably compared to other employees in ProServe, and that Amazon failed to take any remedial action after a male colleague hurled unprovoked epithets at her during a phone call with an HR representative on the line, including calling her a “bitch,” an “idiot” and “nobody.”

The ProServe employees’ petition called for an internal investigation into allegations of “a non-inclusive culture of bullying, fear of retribution for whistle blowers, and a leadership culture that not only fails to protect, but employs and advances those who bully and discriminate.” The employees also called on Amazon to allow investigators unrestricted access to speak with current and former Amazon employees, and to establish a formal employee council to work with external investigators and the broader

organization on Amazon's response to any recommendations made.

Mr. Selipsky reportedly responded to the petition's authors, stating in an email, "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." Absent from Selipsky's email response was the name of the firm conducting the investigation, and he did not indicate whether the results of the investigation would be made public.

Read @cindylwarner1's letter to Amazon CEO Andy Jassy and AWS CEO Adam Selipsky:
Amazon Fired Me for Reporting Gender Bias. Now Others Are Speaking Out.
<https://t.co/n3eEK1axTu>
– Wigdor LLP (@WigdorLaw) [July 23, 2021](#)

Plaintiffs Warner, Newman and others are represented by Wigdor LLP Partners [Lawrence M. Pearson](#) and [Jeanne M. Christensen](#), and Senior Associate [Alfredo J. Pelicci](#).

The Washington Post

"Amazon opens discrimination investigation after internal petition wins backing of hundreds of employees"

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