

Federal Race Discrimination and Retaliation Lawsuit Filed Against Top 50 Law Firm, Troutman Pepper

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BACKGROUND

We represent Gita Sankano, a Black former Associate at Troutman, Pepper, Hamilton, Sanders, LLP, in connection with her claims of race discrimination and retaliation. [The Complaint](#), from which the below allegations are taken, is attached. As alleged, during her four years at Troutman, Ms. Sankano faced blatant discrimination at the hands of various Troutman partners, including discriminatory billing practices, micromanagement, microaggressions, gaslighting and bullying, among other discriminatory behavior. The discrimination came to a head, when, in August 2023, Ms. Sankano received a wildly inappropriate and demeaning email from Partner Matthew Bowsher, whose email discriminatorily called into question Ms. Sankano's basic competence. As alleged, another Black female attorney at the Firm also experienced discrimination at the hands of Mr. Bowsher.

After multiple Partners blew her off, Ms. Sankano filed a formal complaint with HR. Rather than take her complaint seriously, the firm took 77 days to conduct a bogus investigation. Shortly after the "investigation" was concluded, but only after parading Ms. Sankano around at two firm diversity events, the firm summarily terminated Ms. Sankano without any warning whatsoever, purportedly for "poor performance." The firm's supposed explanation for the termination decision could not be more preposterous. Ms. Sankano received no warning whatsoever, at any time, that her job was in jeopardy. She received above average performance reviews each and every review cycle, including in the performance review she received at the time of her termination. Her colleagues and Partners routinely praised her work and told her that they could see her making Partner, and she received multiple, large discretionary bonuses, including one shortly before her complaint of discrimination. Moreover, the attorneys who reviewed her work in November 2023 – the attorneys that she worked for – plainly had no idea that Ms. Sankano was going to be terminated, as their review comments clearly indicate their belief that she would be at the Firm in 2024. Perhaps most damning of all, the firm terminated Ms. Sankano, supposedly for "performance" reasons, but never even told, much less consulted, the Black female Partner for whom Ms. Sankano did 80+% of her work.

Thus, [as alleged in the complaint](#), it is clear that Ms. Sankano was terminated because she dared to call out race discrimination at the Firm. Indeed, shortly after Ms. Sankano's termination it became known among her colleagues that she had been terminated because she made a complaint about a Partner.

Statement of Michael J. Willemin, Partner, Wigdor LLP:

"It is pathetic that in this day and age law firms and other professional services firms continue to discriminate against Black women and, even more so, that they are unwilling to be the least bit introspective and remedy discrimination where it exists. Instead, firms all too often reflexively retaliate

against women of color who, like Ms. Sankano, are brave enough to report discrimination in the workplace.”

Statement of Gita Sankano:

“I was always raised and told to believe that if I put my head down and work hard, I would be judged on the merits of my work and content of my character, and not on the color of my skin. This ideal is always important to keep front of mind, but particularly so this week when we, as a country, honor the Late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Unfortunately, for many women of color, this ideal has not matched reality when it comes to treatment in the workplace. I am filing this lawsuit to bring attention to the discrimination that Black female attorneys at Troutman Pepper, and Black professionals everywhere, continue to experience even now in 2024, as well as the callous disregard with which they are often treated when they push for workplace equality.”