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*NEW YORK (AP) via NewsEdge Corporation -*

Morgan Stanley Dean Witter & Co. was accused by federal authorities in a lawsuit Monday of discriminating against as many as 100 women, including one who said she loved the company but hated discrimination.

"I am here for all of the women who have just begun their careers at Morgan Stanley, who want to believe, as I believed with my whole heart, that discrimination is a thing of the past," Allison Schieffelin said after the lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan.

The lawsuit brought by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission alleged that Morgan Stanley engaged in a discrimination pattern that prevented most women from advancing to the positions and salaries that less productive men achieved.

Morgan Stanley bluntly denied the allegations.

The lawsuit, seeking unspecified compensatory and punitive damages, alleged that the discrimination included trips to strip clubs where business was discussed and the exclusion of female employees from golf outings.

At a news conference, EEOC Chairwoman Cari M. Dominguez delivered a stinging attack on the securities industry, citing sexist practices and a resistance to change.

"All too often, employees in Wall Street firms are reluctant to complain about discriminatory treatment for fear of retaliation or worse. It's been called, 'Kiss your Wall Street career goodbye,'" she said.

The fears, she said, appear to be fueled by a "disturbing employer intolerance of the right to invoke the law when discrimination is suspected." She added, "These practices are unlawful."

Dominguez said the lawsuit draws attention to an "endemic problem that has plagued the securities industry for more than two decades."

"Despite increasing numbers of women pursuing careers on Wall Street, many women continue to face exclusionary barriers that impede their professional growth and their advancement to the highest levels of the industry," she said. "Industry culture often isolates and marginalizes women."

EEOC lawyer Elizabeth Grossman said: "Discrimination has been getting more subtle. Retaliation is becoming more blatant."

Schieffelin, 40, of Manhattan, worked at Morgan Stanley for 15 years, rising to a sales position that paid her more than \$1 million annually. She said a job that would pay several million dollars annually was reserved almost exclusively for men.

"It took me a while to catch on," Schieffelin said. "I didn't want to believe in gender discrimination, as I think most women don't."

Schieffelin said she has had trouble finding comparable work after she was fired last year from her position as a principal in the Institutional Equity Division after complaining to the EEOC.

“Morgan Stanley destroyed my career,” she said. “They destroyed everything that I had put my heart and soul into for fifteen years. And the retaliation that I endured has had the effect ... of sending a loud message to women that if they complain, they too will be diminished from a somebody to a nobody in the Morgan Stanley community.”

Morgan Stanley spokeswoman Judy Hitchen said Schieffelin “was dismissed after she initiated an abusive confrontation with her boss \_ the woman who got the job that Ms. Schieffelin is suing over.”

“We flatly reject their contentions that Schieffelin was discriminated against, noting she was the highest-paid sales person on her desk and that the job she claims she was denied because of gender bias in fact went to another women,” Hitchen said.

Hitchen also attacked claims by the EEOC that the treatment of Schieffelin was an example of the kinds of claims made by other Morgan Stanley workers who have agreed to be identified at a later point.

“Mutual respect and nondiscrimination are core values here and if we have to go to court to prove them, we will,” she said.

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