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Investigative Reporter Michele Gillen Sues CBS, Local TV Stations Group For Age And Sex Discrimination

By Dawn C. Chmielewski on Sep 14, 2018 4:11 pm



Michele Gillen/Facebook; CBS

Award-winning investigative reporter [Michele Gillen](#) filed an age- and gender-discrimination suit against [CBS](#) and its television station group, accusing them of fostering a misogynistic, “good ole boy’s club culture” in its station in Miami, where she was subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment and retaliated against for filing complaints.

Gillen joined [WFOR-TV](#) in 1997, and throughout her 19-year career at the CBS-owned station collected 25 regional Emmy Awards and a total of 46 nominations for investigative series that exposed human trafficking and inhumane conditions in jails that incarcerated the mentally ill.

Despite these professional accolades, Gillen’s suit alleges, she was treated differently than her male or younger female colleagues. She claims projects she pitched or developed either were ignored or given to other reporters, while she was given less desirable assignments and offered little or no support. She personally paid for

production assistants, camera operators and editors to maintain the quality of her on-air work.

When she reported discrimination to the station's human resources department, Gillen was informed, "we must rely on the man upstairs [God]." The station's management retaliated against her for raising complaints, instituting a punitive work quota as she continued to report to the gate-keepers who blocked her access to air time, she alleges in the complaint.



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"The culture of toxic misogyny exposed of late in Hollywood and the national media outlets is and has been thriving at CBS," the suit claims ([read it here](#)). "From the corporate headquarters in New York to the CBS owned and operated station WFOR-TV in Miami, CBS management and human resources is entrenched in what can generously be described as the 'good ole boy's club' culture, which fosters misogyny, places men on a pedestal, elevates and protects men despite bad behavior, emboldens and protects bullies; and, often with the help of bullies, pushes women out who are beyond the age of forty."

A spokesperson for [CBS Television Stations](#) issued a statement saying it treated Gillen fairly.

"We have not yet been served with a copy of the complaint, but we are confident that Michele Gillen was treated fairly when she worked for WFOR-TV, and station management's decision to not renew her contract in 2016 was justified," the station group's spokesman told Deadline.

The 22-page complaint, filed today in federal district court in Miami, contains numerous accounts of bullying and abusive behavior on the part of KFOR's management and male colleagues.

The lawsuit includes one anecdote involving another investigative reporter at the station, Jim DeFede. During a special projects staff meeting, he allegedly hurled “false and humiliating accusations” at Gillen and, later, disparaged the station’s female viewers, saying he was done trying to figure out which stories might appeal to “women who are menstruating and watching *Blue Bloods*.”



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The manager did nothing to check the behavior, which the lawsuit claims emboldened DeFede’s behavior. Gillen said she took a leave of absence to escape the toxic work environment. On the day she returned to work, she filed a formal discrimination complaint with human resources. When she arrived at the station, Gillen learned she had been removed as the anchor of her public affairs show, *Focus on South Florida*.

Gillen confronted the news director, Liz Roldan, about the act, which she considered retaliation.

“God damn it, no one was supposed to tell you. No one can keep a secret in this newsroom,” Roldan allegedly responded, according to the suit. “It is just a business decision for us. Don’t take it personally.”

The suit alleges that station manager Cari Hernandez would make derogatory comments about Gillen’s age to other employees, confiding to one cameraman, “I can’t stand that old bitch.”

Gillen brought her concerns to Robin Bona, SVP human resources in New York, who allegedly dismissed the journalist’s concerns, responding, “You can’t claim discrimination, you have a female news director.” In a meeting that took place in Miami, Gillen informed Bona that the environment had become so hostile that going to work made her sick. Bona attributed that to tempers flaring and said her investigation found no policy violations.



“Ms. Gillen told Bona of news director Liz Roldan criticizing, belittling and downplaying her ideas, even those that went on to win Emmys or be Emmy nominated. This contrasted with the experience of her male colleague, Jim DeFede, who, despite his bullying and harassment of Gillen, was getting on TV with even greater frequency,” Gillen asserted in her suit. “Bona’s response was: ‘Favoritism is not illegal.’”

On September 30, 2016, Gillen was blindsided. She recently had returned from an unpaid family leave to care for her ailing mother, suffering the last stages of Alzheimer’s disease, when she called to the station — ostensibly to cover potential breaking news. She was called into the office of station general manager Adam Levy, who fired Gillen, saying her position had been eliminated.

“We don’t want you working here anymore,” Levy informed her, according to the suit.

Gillen is seeking a jury trial in her suit, seeking to recover lost wages, damages and her legal fees.

This article was printed from <https://deadline.com/2018/09/michele-gillen-sues-cbs-local-tv-stations-group-age-sex-discrimination-1202465021/>