

**BLOGS**

Archives;Class Action & Litigation;Discrimination;Education;Harassment

Three Former UMD Coaches Sue University Alleging Gender and Sexual Orientation Discrimination

Three former University of Minnesota-Duluth coaches [filed suit](#) against the University Board of Regents on Monday in federal court. Former women’s hockey coach Shannon Miller, former softball coach Jen Banford, and former women’s basketball coach Annette Wiles allege that University administrators discriminated against them based on their gender and sexual orientation and failed to properly investigate reports of harassment and discrimination. The lawsuit also claims disparities between the men’s and women’s athletic programs at the University.

This lawsuit comes at a time of increased focus on the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals. As covered in a [previous post](#), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commissions current strategic plan identifies GLBTQ rights as an enforcement priority, and the EEOC has ruled that Title VIIs sex discrimination prohibitions extend to sexual orientation and gender identity. The EEOCs position makes it likely that employees will pursue sexual orientation and gender identity claims under federal law, with expanded options for damages.

In addition to helping to shape an evolving legal landscape, the UMD case is likely to be a high profile one. Prior to the University announcing last December that Millers contract would not be renewed, Miller was the highest-paid women’s hockey coach in the country and had helped the team win five national championships. In her complaint, Miller alleges [multiple instances of inaction](#) by the University’s HR department, including claims that no remedial action was taken after she was called a dyke by a male coworker, received harassing mail, and was excluded from an athletics department golf tournament. The University has stated that the nonrenewal of Millers contract was due to financial restrictions, but Millers lawsuit counters that these financial restrictions did not affect the men’s hockey coach who earns \$93,241 more per year than Miller did.

Like Miller, Banford alleges that she received harassing mail. She also claims that she received conflicting messages about her future employment with the University around the time that Millers contract was not renewed. In turn, Wiles claims that a hostile work environment at the University forced her to resign this past summer. Wiles contributes the hostility to her coming out as a lesbian in 2013.

[In a statement to the Star Tribune](#), UMD Chancellor Lendley C. Black denied that the University discriminated against the former coaches and stated, I’m quite

Related People

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confident that throughout this process, it will be made clear that our decisions were made in the best interests of UMD.
I'm confident we made the right decisions.