A senior sales consultant who worked in IBM's Melbourne office is suing the company for $1.1 million after it failed to act on her repeated complaints of serious sexual harassment and bullying.

The woman, now aged in her 40s, suffered such serious stress related illness about her work situation that she twice attempted suicide. She is currently unfit for work and medical advice suggests she will remain this way for the foreseeable future.

Maurice Blackburn Special Counsel Siobhan Keating said the woman endured almost two years of sexual harassment, unlawful discrimination and bullying.

"Maurice Blackburn is lodging a claim against IBM in the Australian Human Rights Commission today seeking $1.1 million in damages," Ms Keating said.

"Our client was a high performing executive earning in excess of $150,000 per year, and often took home bonuses of several thousand dollars per month.

"She did her job very well until the appointment of a new senior manager, who systematically harassed and bullied her. This senior manager, who no longer works at the company:
• repeatedly rubbed himself against our client as he walked by her work station;
• made comments such as 'if you get your breasts out, you will get more sales';
• made sexual remarks in front of her during Christmas events; and
• repeatedly placed his hand on her leg and up her dress several times at an evening function.

"Bullying by the same senior manager included:
• yelling and abuse;
• name calling, including calling our client 'stupid';
• unreasonable work demands;
• repeatedly calling our client late at night; and
• threats and intimidation, including repeatedly telling our client 'I'm watching your every step'.

"Despite complaining to four managers, and our client's obvious and visible distress which was affecting her performance, no action was taken for almost 18 months. IBM's inaction is impossible to understand.

"The attitude of IBM in the face of these serious allegations, including repeatedly turning a 'blind eye', urging our client not to make a formal complaint, and not wanting to be told of details, exacerbated the damage to our client's career and health and pushed our client to the edge.
"The effect on our client has been devastating. She has lost her career at IBM and it is unclear whether she will work again. She suffers from low self-esteem, loss of confidence, insomnia, anxiety and severe depression.

"She has lost her good health and the enjoyment of her profession - which she was extremely good at before this senior manager was appointed.

"The claim in the Australian Human Rights Commission takes into account pain and suffering, the loss of future earnings as a high salaried professional, and medical expenses. MB will seek to expedite the case and, if it is not resolved in the AHRC, Federal court proceedings will be promptly issued.

"No one has a right to bully or sexually harass a colleague at work. IBM's continued poor handling of this matter has harmed our client in the most severe of ways.

"We allege that the conduct of the senior manager was unlawful and that IBM's inaction was unlawful. These are serious issues that should have been dealt with immediately.

"Letting these issues fester and continue to build up has destroyed the life of our client.

"This kind of corporate inaction and trying to sweep the issues under the carpet is unacceptable."

Note to editors

Our client is NOT available for ANY interviews due to her delicate mental state. However, a separate statement from our client is available here. No photos of our client will be provided and we ask that her request to maintain her anonymity is respected.

Maurice Blackburn employment Special Counsel Siobhan Keating, who is representing the client, is available for interviews.

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