KMB Client Sues Booz Allen for Sex Discrimination and Retaliation

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The *Washington Post* details the lawsuit against multi-billion government consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton filed by Katz, Marshall & Banks on behalf of client Dr. Margo Fitzpatrick. A partner and 13-year veteran of the firm, Dr. Fitzpatrick was a victim of sex discrimination that excluded women from the top rank of the company. Booz Allen ultimately terminated Dr. Fitzpatrick in retaliation for opposing this unequal treatment. Dr. Fitzpatrick seeks justice, reinstatement and an end to sex discrimination at the firm.

Read the *Fitzpatrick v. Booz Allen Hamilton* sex discrimination and retaliation complaint. The press release follows:
Second Lawsuit Filed Against Booz Allen Hamilton [BAH] Alleges Sexual Discrimination and Retaliatory Firing of Female Corporate Partner

Suit Charges that Government Contractor Maintains “Glass Ceiling” Barring Women from Top Leadership Positions and Ousts Female Executives Who Object to Sex Discrimination

(Washington D.C.) A lawsuit brought against Washington D.C.-based multi-billion dollar government consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc. (BAH) and four of its senior executives alleges sexual discrimination and the retaliatory firing of a female partner. The suit, which seeks $40 million in compensatory and punitive damages, was filed in the District of Columbia Superior Court (Case No. 2011 CA 00675B).

The suit has been brought by Dr. Margo Fitzpatrick, a former Booz Allen partner who joined the Firm in 1999. It alleges that the Firm’s corporate leadership maintains a glass ceiling that excludes women from the highest-ranking positions by manipulating the evaluation and promotion system and allowing the assessment process to be riddled with sex stereotyping and discriminatory assessments of female employees. The suit asserts that when Dr. Fitzpatrick and other women executives questioned these practices and the lack of women in leadership positions, senior male executives told them that they risked being fired by doing so. Dr. Fitzpatrick was told to remain silent about such issues, and one senior male executive warned her: “Don’t go there” if you want to keep your job. Women like Dr. Fitzpatrick who ignored this advice and raised legitimate concerns about the Firm’s pattern of sex discrimination found their careers derailed.

Today, there are no women occupying any of the top 45 leadership positions at Booz Allen Hamilton, including its board of directors, firm leadership team, leaders of market sectors and capability areas and executive vice presidents. “Contrary to Booz Allen’s self-claimed and much-hyped commitment to a diverse workforce, the highest circle of its corporate leadership is off-limits to women and is maintained that way by its male executives,” said Debra S. Katz, an attorney for Dr. Fitzpatrick. “No matter how accomplished or successful you are at Booz Allen Hamilton, if you’re a woman, you will hit a glass ceiling. And when you raise concerns about the exclusion of women from leadership positions at the Firm or other blatant acts of sex discrimination, you will find yourself, as Dr. Fitzpatrick did, out of a job.”

The lawsuit details that Dr. Fitzpatrick was a stand-out performer at Booz Allen. Early in her career, she received its highest honor – a Performance Excellence Award – for her team’s work on its Internal Revenue Service modernization project. She rapidly ascended the Firm’s management ladder, becoming a partner in 2005. Between the Firm’s fiscal years 2008 and 2010, Dr. Fitzpatrick won over $588 million in new business and contracts for Booz Allen and each of her performance evaluations rated her as “On Track” for promotion to Lead Partner. In Dr. Fitzpatrick’s 2009 evaluation, the Firm lauded her for being “universally regarded as one of our best partners for identifying, shaping and capturing new business in the financial marketplace.” It further stated that Dr. Fitzpatrick is recognized as an “expert in financial reform by senior clients as well as Booz Allen colleagues” and is “unmatched in the firm at establishing and growing senior relationships in the financial market and capturing new business as a result of her ability to identify and clearly articulate solutions to her clients.”

This same evaluation described Dr. Fitzpatrick as a “great partner” on a “strong vector.” Soon after, Mr. Howell, Executive Vice President (EVP), was appointed leader of the Finance team and Dr. Fitzpatrick’s direct supervisor. Immediately upon assuming this role, he informed Dr. Fitzpatrick that the financial services industry was a “good ole boys club” and that if the Firm was to be successful it would have to become part of “the club.” Mr. Howell created an increasingly hostile environment for Fitzpatrick and other women on the Finance team, repeatedly referring to them in derogatory and sexist terms. After several months, Fitzpatrick reported this discriminatory behavior to a senior official and asked for help to stop the “gender stereotyping”. Thereafter and throughout 2010, Howell — who had earlier warned a female executive not to say “feminist things because Ralph [Shrader] doesn’t like that” — and other male executives retaliated by regularly excluding Dr. Fitzpatrick and other women from key meetings and other opportunities in an unsuccessful effort to prevent her from continuing her proven track record for developing new business and serving clients. In August 2010, Howell and the other named defendants acted together to give her an “Off Track” evaluation that was then used to deny her promotion and justify her termination.
“I was a successful executive at Booz Allen, recognized for my expertise and my work in winning over $500 million in contracts during a three-year period,” said Dr. Fitzpatrick. “But I ended up a victim of sex discrimination and retaliation, and was driven out of the Firm. I’m seeking justice not only for myself, but for many other women who continue to face the very same kind of discrimination in their careers at Booz Allen.”

The suit, which is the second major sex discrimination action filed against Booz Allen in the past month by a senior female partner, further alleges that male executives were routinely given preferential treatment and extravagant perks that helped to position them for advancement. In the words of a senior male executive, “Booz Allen is a kingdom and Ralph [Shrader] is our king. To live in the kingdom, we need to do what the king wants us to do or we would be thrown out.” But, as the suit alleges, the highest ranks of the kingdom were closed to women, no matter how well they performed their jobs, secured new business or helped the company profit.

Dr. Fitzpatrick’s suit names four senior male executives as defendants: EVP Lloyd Howell of Washington, D.C.; EVP Patrick Peck of Leesburg, Virginia; SVP Samuel Porgess of Los Angeles, California; and EVP and Chief Operating Officer Horacio Rozanski of Potomac, Maryland.

Dr. Fitzpatrick is represented by attorney Debra S. Katz of Katz, Marshall & Banks, LLP.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., Booz Allen Hamilton is one of the nation’s leading government contracting firms, with more than 25,000 employees worldwide. In FY 2011, the company generated $5.6 billion in revenue, with nearly all of the revenue generated by tax-supported government competitive and non-competitive contracts.

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