

Charter Facing Another Suit Alleging NY1 Bias, Harassment

By **Anne Cullen**

Law360 (August 27, 2020, 7:53 PM EDT) -- A former senior producer for NY1 has sued Charter Communications claiming management ignored the "incessant sexual harassment" she faced and was blatantly biased against older female anchors, adding to gender bias allegations that have beleaguered popular New York City news station over the past year.

Karin Garfin, who worked on the news station's theater-focused "On Stage" show in the second half of 2017, lodged her suit in New York state court on Wednesday alleging her boss, executive producer Kevin Dugan, constantly badgered her with unwanted sexual advances and berated her when she refused them.

Her lengthy complaint also lends credence to a **pair of age and gender discrimination lawsuits** filed back-to-back last summer in which NY1 anchors and reporters said management is hostile toward female journalists over 40, deliberately driving them out in favor of younger on-air talent.

Charter has denied those allegations, but Garfin told the court Wednesday she regularly heard Dugan and other NY1 leadership liken veteran female anchors to "dinosaurs," disparage their appearances and plot to get rid of them in pursuit of a "new fresher look."

Garfin said she was ultimately given the boot after just a few months on the job because she stood up for her female colleagues and rebuffed Dugan's unwelcome sexual come-ons.

"The reason she was fired was because she would not allow defendant EP Dugan to sexually harass her, and would not accede to his requests to date him or have sex with him, and because she vehemently objected to the disgusting age, gender and disability discrimination that defendants regularly forced Ms. Garfin to witness," according to her complaint.

Garfin alleged Dugan warned her that he would never be fired because of his ties to management, and she said his threat proved accurate. Her repeated complaints to Dugan's bosses — including former NY1 managing editor Joi De Leon and one-time senior vice president Audrey Gruber — were shot down, she said, with higher-ups acknowledging Dugan's inappropriate behavior but openly seeking to protect him.

"The way that female journalists were treated at NY1 on a day-to-day basis while I worked there was repulsive and completely accepted by management, who took no action whatsoever to protect us," Garfin told Law360 on Thursday.

Garfin's lawyer, Goddard Law PLLC managing attorney Megan Goddard, said she's proud to back the producer in this battle, arguing "if we are ever to achieve gender equality, it will be because women like her stood up against discrimination — not only for themselves, but also for other women being discriminated against in the workplace."

A spokesperson for Charter did not respond to a request for comment on Thursday.

Five longtime news anchors, including well-known journalist Roma Torre, **kicked off the wave of legal activity** against NY1 in June 2019, alleging in New York federal court managers slashed their airtime, passed them over for assignments and promotions, and reduced their visibility on the station's website because they wanted younger talent in front of the camera.

A month later, two former NY1 journalists **filed another complaint** alleging they were pink-slipped because they were pregnant or were just returning from maternity leave.

The latter dispute has since moved to arbitration, along with allegations by one of the five anchors behind the June lawsuit. Charter has asked the court to throw out the rest of the Torre case, arguing the women involved have alleged nothing aside from everyday slights and harms many experience at work.

The current set of allegations are also reminiscent of a case lodged in 2002 by former NY1 reporter Adele Sammarco, who accused the station of operating like "a high school boys' locker room," with the "highest levels of NY1's management sexually harass[ing] female employees and treat[ing] the newsroom like a meat market."

After a high-profile, two-week trial in 2010, the jury sided against Sammarco, clearing the station and its leadership of misconduct.

According to Garfin's suit Wednesday, the litigation was laughed about around the office, with Dugan noting once that "you just don't win if you go up against NY1."

Charter picked up the station after it **merged with** Time Warner Cable in 2016.

Garfin is represented by Megan S. Goddard and Saranicole A. Duaban of Goddard Law PLLC.

Counsel information for Charter was not immediately available.

Wednesday's state court case is Karin Garfin v. Charter Communications Inc. et al., case number 156813/2020, in the Supreme Court of New York.

Last year's federal lawsuits are Perez et al. v. Charter Communications, case number 1:19-cv-07141, and Torre et al. v. Charter Communications, case number 1:19-cv-05708, both in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

--Additional reporting by Kevin Stawicki and Craig Clough. Editing by Philip Shea.