



Portfolio Media, Inc. | 111 West 19th Street, 5th floor | New York, NY 10011 | www.law360.com
Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

Woman From Viral Birdwatcher Spat Sues Franklin Templeton

By **Alexis Shanes**

Law360 (May 26, 2021, 3:14 PM EDT) -- A woman who went viral last May after calling the police on a Black birdwatcher in Central Park slapped her former employer Franklin Templeton with a discrimination suit, claiming the investment firm labeled her a racist and unfairly fired her.

Amy Cooper sued the firm in Manhattan federal court Tuesday, saying the company put out misleading public statements about its investigation into the park incident and fired her without a genuine inquiry. Her complaint includes claims for race and gender discrimination, defamation, emotional distress and negligence.

Cooper was walking her dog in Central Park at the time of her encounter with birdwatcher Christian Cooper on May 25, 2020. They are not related.

Christian Cooper videoed their confrontation, which was shared around the world via social media. In the video, Amy Cooper shouted at the birdwatcher and called the police on him, saying he threatened her.

"She did these things because she was alone in the park and frightened to death after being selected as the next target of Christian Cooper, an overzealous birdwatcher engaged in Central Park's ongoing feud between birdwatchers and dog owners," Amy Cooper said in the complaint.

But although she was fired a day later, Franklin Templeton never actually did its due diligence, Amy Cooper said.

The company's only communication with Amy Cooper was the day of the incident, when she was "palpably distraught and fearful of her safety," she said, adding that the company did not even try to contact Christian Cooper, interview anyone else involved or obtain her 911 calls.

Franklin Templeton CEO Jenny Johnson, who is named in the complaint, gave media interviews about how the company handled the situation in the following days and weeks. Amy Cooper said those interviews wrongly gave the impression that Franklin Templeton had conducted a fair investigation.

On Twitter, the company's statement about the incident got roughly 277,000 likes, Amy Cooper added. The complaint noted that the company's telephone system gave callers access to her personal cellphone number, which people used to threaten her via call and text after the incident.

"Franklin Templeton's alleged investigation and results provided legitimacy to the 'Karen' story, and appeared to provide justification for those who sought the destruction of plaintiff's life," Amy Cooper said.

She also pointed to a media statement from a Black dog walker who also claimed Christian Cooper was "threatening with his body language and screaming" at people who walked their dogs off-leash even before the viral incident. Franklin Templeton didn't consider that perspective, she said.

"The world decided that Ms. Cooper was expendable and that her side of the story didn't matter because she was a 'Karen,'" Andrea Paparella and Matthew Litt, attorneys for Amy Cooper, told Law360 Wednesday.

Amy Cooper argued that she wouldn't have been fired if not for being a white woman, saying a company subsidiary allowed a male convicted felon who physically abused his wife to serve on its board of directors for seven years.

Amy Cooper had worked at Franklin Templeton since June 2015, she said. According to the complaint, she had recently advanced at the firm and consistently earned recognition for being a high performer.

"We believe the circumstances of the situation speak for themselves and that the company responded appropriately," a spokesperson for Franklin Templeton told Law360 in a Wednesday statement. "We will defend against these baseless claims."

Amy Cooper is represented by Andrea Paparella of the Law Office of Andrea Paparella PLLC and Matthew Litt of Litt Law PC.

Counsel information for Franklin Templeton was not immediately available Wednesday.

The case is Amy Cooper v. Franklin Templeton et al., case number 1:21-cv-04692, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

--Editing by Neil Cohen.

All Content © 2003-2021, Portfolio Media, Inc.