

Female workers at Walmart sue retailer over gender bias

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Walmart, the world's largest retailer, is once again facing numerous sexual discrimination lawsuits, eight years after the US supreme court blocked a class action against the company that was the largest gender discrimination case ever brought against an employer. On 1 February nearly 100 current and former workers filed gender discrimination lawsuits against Walmart alleging denial of equal pay.

Francine Radtka worked as a deli manager at Walmart in Manatee County, Florida, from 1995 to 2000. She expressed concerns to her manager when she found out the other department managers, all men, were being paid much more than she was, and ultimately quit after she was forced to take on the duties of the bakery manager for several months without any additional compensation.

"I went from working 50 hours a week to 80 to 90 hours a week. I asked for a raise because I was working a whole other department and the manager told me no," Radtka said. "You work a salary, so if you work 80 hours or 50 hours, you get the same amount of money."

Radtka is among the women now suing Walmart. The lawsuits follow the 2011 US supreme court ruling in the Walmart Stores v Dukes case. Originally filed in 2001, the case received class certification in 2004 to represent 1.5 million current and former female Walmart employees, the largest employment class-action lawsuit in US history.

The ruling did not make a decision on the merit of the claims; rather, the court ruled that the lawsuit was too large to constitute a class action lawsuit. The decision has prompted the plaintiffs from that case to file individual regional lawsuits against Walmart.

Lindsey Wagner, a lawyer representing the plaintiffs in both lawsuits, said: "There was a culture at Walmart that existed way before 1999 and continued on, and still continues on, and the circumstance that women have been selected for various positions with no opportunity for growth, and no opportunity for promotion." New female employees were often placed in cashier roles, while men were placed in departments such as electronics or sporting goods where fast-track promotion opportunities were available.

Wagner said more lawsuits were likely to be filed in the coming months.

Walmart recently changed its absence policy after pressure from lawsuits and advocacy groups, which alleged pregnant workers faced discrimination. Workers have also pushed for the company to reveal the extent of pay gaps between men and women.

A company spokesperson said in an email to the Guardian: "Walmart has had a strong policy against discrimination for many years and we continue to be a great place for women to work and advance. The allegations from these plaintiffs are not representative of the positive experiences millions of women have had at Walmart ... we plan to defend the company."

‘Women have been selected for positions with no opportunity for promotion’ Lindsey Wagner Lawyer