

Construction firm settles \$1.5M sexual harassment case

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The New York Attorney General's Office has reached a \$1.5 million settlement with a Long Island-based construction company over claims that several workers—mostly women of color—were sexually harassed while working at the firm.

The settlement goes to 18 former employees of Trade Off Construction who experienced sexual harassment at the firm, which included managers demanding sex acts in exchange for pay or overtime work and managers and coworkers sending out explicit photos and videos, according to Attorney General Letitia James. The deal sets up a fund for other workers who experienced sexual harassment at the firm as well.

The investigation into Trade Off revealed a pattern of sexual harassment against female employees going back at least four years and found that several workers who complained about this experienced

retaliation. It is the first settlement regarding sexual harassment in the construction industry for James' office.

Jaleesa McCrimmon, a former Trade Off employee, said she was assaulted by a coworker while working at the company and was proud to speak up about it.

"I was not going to be silent about what happened to me," she said, "I felt that it was my duty to speak up and take a stand so that this unfortunate experience did not happen to other women. When I spoke up, I felt amazing."

Tierra Williams, another former Trade Off employee, echoed these comments.

"I really wanted to put one foot forward for the women that are hiding behind the curtain of fear," she said.

Trade Off spokesman Brian Krapf released a statement saying the company "deeply regrets that our processes for training and oversight failed some of the women who worked for us" and that it is committed to working with the Attorney General's office to improve employee protections.

The Mason Tenders District Council/Laborers Local 79 initially referred the matter to the Attorney General's Office, and Trade Off's statement indicated that their troubled relationship with the union played a role in this as well.

"Though Trade Off acknowledges the deficiencies of its system and pledges to improve them, we believe many of the complaints were driven by a long-lasting dispute with a union that had trouble competing with Trade Off for labor services," Krapf said.

Robert Bonanza, Mason Tenders' business manager, said in a statement that the union "thank[s] the former employees of Trade Off for their courage in coming forward to expose the horrific treatment they experienced while on the job."

Trade Off provides non-union labor at construction sites, and at least 16 women were harassed due to its failure to stop or effectively respond to sexual harassment at its sites, according to the investigation. At least

12 workers were fired after they complained about harassment, and Trade Off managers often protected the harassers from being punished, according to the investigation.

Trade Off has also agreed to employ an independent monitor for three years and develop a new more thorough sexual harassment policy that the Attorney General's office will review.

"This is our first, but this will not be our last," James said of the settlement regarding sexual harassment in the construction industry, "so let this be a lesson to other construction companies and to employers in general who think that they can harass and take advantage of staff: it will not be tolerated."