

**Law360, London (February 3, 2020, 7:23 PM GMT) --** Credit Suisse is hitting back at allegations in a High Court suit that two of its employees engaged in a campaign of bullying and harassment to force a research analyst to resign after they learned she was pregnant.

Marina Pronina is seeking damages, claiming she is suffering from a psychiatric injury and is unable to return to work as a result of a calculated course of conduct in 2016 by Managing Director Andrew Garthwaite and Steve East — ex-head of equity research for Europe, the Middle East and Africa — to make her resign.

In a defense filed on Jan. 28, the bank denied acting negligently in failing its obligation to ensure her well-being. The bank said that a poor performance review, which Pronina had claimed caused her distress, was only the latest in a series of meetings raising performance issues for the 14-year bank employee that began before she told the bank she became pregnant, according to the document.

The bank is responding to claims that Pronina — who is a director in the global equity strategy team — was bullied and harassed, and that there was a practice in the office of forcing unwelcome employees to resign. According to a November particulars of claim, Pronina alleged that the two men had decided that taking maternity leave would "disrupt the team" and it would be much more straightforward "if she were to leave and make way for a man." She also said Credit Suisse failed to support her after she informed the bank of her pregnancy.

"The atmosphere within the team is often highly charged and testosterone-fueled," the claim says. "Garthwaite appears to relish this."

But the bank dismissed those claims, saying that Pronina became "unwilling to accept there was a need to improve her performance" after a series of discussions with East and Garthwaite about her work. Pronina was failing to deliver in some aspects of her role — namely "original work" — which had been raised in year-end reviews prior to the beginning of the alleged bullying, the defense says.

For example, her managers had raised concerns that, given her high position in the team, she was not arriving at the office early enough. Pronina had been asked in December 2014 to be at work by 8 a.m. at least once a week but only arrived at the requested time twice in the whole of 2015, according to the suit.

According to the defense, Pronina was resistant to the idea that she needed to improve and when they suggested during a meeting in July 2016 that she move to a specialist sales role, which “it was felt would play well to her strengths,” she reacted badly.

The aim of the discussion was to find the best way forward and was not conducted in an “aggressive or hostile manner — nor was there any foul language — as alleged,” the bank said. “Thus the defendants deny the assertion that the meeting was part of a conspiracy ... to force her to resign,” the document reads.

The bank also denies that Pronina told Steve East she had been made sick by the conduct of the meeting. When Pronina took time off, East and Garthwaite offered to do “anything we can do to support you,” and said if she needed to take further time off due to illness, she should, according to the defense.

After she informed the bank of the pregnancy, she was also no longer expected to travel for work or undertake external marketing. Pronina was also allowed to work from home in the advanced stages of her pregnancy, the document reads.

In the November filing, Pronina also alleged she was humiliated and intimidated by her superiors.

Garthwaite physically intimidated Pronina on several occasions by “putting his foot on the claimant’s desk such that his crotch was no more than a few centimeters from her face,” the claim reads. When she asked Garthwaite to stop he responded with “don’t be so sensitive,” according

the suit.

She was also deliberately given menial tasks as a tactic to force her to resign and excluded from social functions. The claim form also alleges that Garthwaite intentionally tried to trip her with his bags when she was in her later stages of pregnancy.

Separately, the claimant has also brought proceedings against the defendants in the Employment Tribunal based on the same facts — which is currently stayed while the High Court claim is ongoing.

The claimant is seeking £50,000 (\$64,900) in damages and £3,000 toward the cost of past and future counseling and psychiatric treatment.

Representatives for Pronina did not immediately respond to request for comment Monday.

Marina Pronina is represented by Peter Edwards of Devereux Chambers instructed by Brahams Dutt Badrick French LLP.

Credit Suisse is represented by Dominic Nolan QC instructed by in-house counsel.

The case is Pronina v. Credit Suisse International, case number QB-2019-002438, in the High Court of Justice of England and Wales.