

# Former McDermott Paralegal Says Age Bias Got Her Fired

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[McDermott Will & Schulte LLP](#) unlawfully terminated a paralegal months before her 65th birthday and replaced her with a younger worker based on the "obtuse" assumption that her performance didn't justify her salary, according to a lawsuit filed Thursday in Texas federal court.

In a [14-page complaint](#), Sonja Guenter accused McDermott of age bias in violation of the Texas Commission on Human Rights Act and the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act. According to her complaint, Guenter worked for 16 years with the same group of lawyers, who consistently gave her positive feedback on her performance and recruited her to follow them when they switched firms, but she was abruptly fired in March 2025 for supposed performance deficiencies.

Guenter claimed that the decision to terminate her was made by McDermott's paralegal management group, not the lawyers she directly worked with, and came just months after her remote managers inexplicably gave her lower ratings than she believed she deserved on an annual performance review.

"The paralegal management group's termination of Ms. Guenter was based on an obtuse and distant bottom-line theory that more senior paralegals like Ms. Guenter were not worth their senior salary and not able to keep up with evolving legal technologies," according to the complaint. "Rather than investing in knowing about each individual paralegal and his or her contributions to the firm and the Austin partnership, the firm's nonlawyer managers decided that a younger paralegal made more 'business sense' and terminated Ms. Guenter."

Guenter said she began working as a paralegal in McDermott's intellectual property litigation practice in August 2022 after being recruited by attorneys with whom she'd worked for over a decade. According to her complaint, she was entrusted with work on high-stakes, complex intellectual property trials in 2023 and 2024, and in both years, her annual reviews were filled with praise for her performance.

On her 2024 evaluation, however, her manager gave her several ratings of 2, meaning she met some or most expectations, without providing any explanation, which was "difficult, if not impossible, to square with the generally positive comments" she received, Guenter said.

After receiving the evaluation in early December 2024, Guenter requested a meeting with her supervisor, and when she followed up two weeks later, the supervisor agreed to put something on the calendar, according to the complaint. However, no meeting was scheduled, and Guenter received no further negative feedback until she was terminated on March 3, 2025, she claimed in her lawsuit, filed in the [U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas](#).

Guenter added that she never received any warnings or counseling about her performance before her termination, nor was she placed on a performance improvement plan, and she'd received a merit-based raise and bonus just months earlier.

Additionally, within days of firing Guenter, McDermott posted a job listing for an IP paralegal in its Austin office with at least four years of experience, according to the complaint.

Holt Lackey, who is representing Guenter, told Law360 that his client "looks forward to her day in court."

"Despite decades of excellent performance known to the Austin partners who worked with her every day, McDermott's remote non-attorney management team put a thumb on the scale against her and pushed her out based on her age," Lackey said.

McDermott did not respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Guenter is represented by Holt Major Lackey and Amaris Isabel Diaz of Holt Major Lackey PLLC.

Counsel information for McDermott was not immediately available.

The case is Guenter v. McDermott Will & Schulte LLP, case number [1:26-cv-00659](#), in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas.

--Editing by Karin Roberts.

*Update: This article has been updated with comment from Lackey, counsel for Guenter.*