

## Former News Anchor Files Gender Discrimination Lawsuit Against KUSI



Sandra Maas worked at KUSI as an anchor from 2004 until June 2019. She is suing the station on claims of gender and age discrimination, retaliation and failure to provide equal pay. (Courtesy photo)

Sandra Maas claims her contract was not renewed after the television station refused to address a large pay gap between her and her male co-anchor

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SAN DIEGO —

A former longtime news anchor at KUSI has filed a lawsuit accusing the television station of failing to address a pay gap of at least \$70,000 between her and her male co-anchor, a dispute that ended with her termination last month.

Sandra Maas is asking for \$10 million in relief in the lawsuit filed Tuesday against McKinnon Broadcasting Co. in San Diego Superior Court.

Maas is suing under the California Equal Pay Act, which requires equal pay for employees who perform “substantially similar work” when judging skill, effort, and responsibility.

The lawsuit also alleges gender and age discrimination and retaliation.

“Women should get equal pay for equal work and performance,” Maas said in an interview with the Union-Tribune Wednesday. “It shouldn’t be a question in 2019.

“The generation of women before me, they had to endure wage disparity in the workplace,” she added. “The generation behind me should not have to.”

KUSI, when reached by phone Wednesday, said it had no comment on the allegations.

Maas, who has worked as an anchor in San Diego since 1990, was hired at KUSI in 2004 as a morning co-anchor. She was promoted to evening co-anchor in 2010. She hosted “Inside San Diego” and produced a weekly segment, “Healthy Living.”

According to the complaint, Maas’ suspicion that she was earning substantially less than her male counterpart was affirmed when her former manager told her she was making at least \$90,000 less each year.

Maas began to address the apparent pay inequality starting December 2017 during contract renewal negotiations, according to the lawsuit.

Frustrated by the progress, she filed a complaint in April 2018 with KUSI’s general manager, Mike McKinnon Jr., highlighting her experience and skills and arguing “there is no reason my compensation should be less than multiple male counterparts at KUSI,” according to the lawsuit.

In her letter, she summoned KUSI’s retired consumer investigative reporter, Michael Turko, and his key phrase: “It ain’t right.”

The complaint was not well received, her lawsuit states, and the station’s human resources director intervened in the negotiations. A month later, a contract was offered that was still \$70,000 below what she understood her male co-anchor to be making, according to the suit.

Her co-anchor left the station in February, and he confirmed his salary was \$70,000 higher than hers, the lawsuit states.

“I loved my co-anchor. He’s fabulous,” she told the Union-Tribune. “He earned every penny of his salary, but I deserved to earn that, as well.”

On May 17, Maas asked for a meeting with McKinnon to discuss her expiring contract, and instead news director Steve Cohen told her the station would not be renewing, the suit says.

She was told the decision had nothing to do with her performance but that KUSI was “bringing in a new generation of people,” the lawsuit states.

“At KUSI, male anchors were given the opportunity to determine when to leave the job,” the lawsuit says. “At KUSI, the standard was different for women over forty compared to men over forty.”

Maas’ last day was June 13, without the usual fanfare, the lawsuit says. She ended the 10 p.m. newscast with a farewell to viewers and the crew, saying: “Although I won’t be delivering the news, I do hope to be making news. And making a difference for women in the workplace.”

The Equal Pay Act was updated in 2015, making it no longer a requirement for an employee to prove that gender, race or ethnicity was a motivating factor for being paid less than other colleagues, said Maas’ attorney, Joshua Gruenberg.

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/courts/story/2019-06-26/former-longtime-kusi-anchor-claims-gender-discrimination-in-lawsuit>