

Former anchor sues news station for \$10M over pay inequality: 'I was at the top of my game'

MAKERS

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For the past 10 years, the people of San Diego came to know journalist Sandra Maas on the field, talking to community members about issues impacting the San Diego area. For others, she became a part of their everyday routine, watching the day's top news stories over dinner on local station KUSI's evening news.

Now, the woman who was once the “face of KUSI” is suing her former employer for \$10 million in reparations, claiming she was not paid the same amount as her male co-anchors, and later terminated for demanding equal pay.

“The difference in pay didn't have anything to do with our difference in work, experience or performance— it had everything to do with the fact that I'm a woman,” former KUSI co-anchor Sandra Maas tells Yahoo Lifestyle. “[Fighting for equal pay] definitely cost me my job.”

Sandra Maas worked at KUSI as its lead evening anchor for 10 years— her male counterparts were paid more than 40 percent than she was. (Credit: Sandra Maas)

For the 10 years that she co-anchored the station's most popular time slot, Maas claims her male counterparts were paid significantly more than she was for the exact same job— a violation of California's Equal Pay Act.

“I was doing the exact same job as my male co-anchor, performing the same duties and he was getting paid 40 percent more than I was,” Maas says, adding that over the course of the decade, the pay gap would probably add up to about \$1 million.

However, Maas was doing much more than the same amount of work as her male co-workers. According to her attorney, Josh Gruenberg, Maas went “went above and beyond in performing extracurriculars for the station.”

From the time that Maas joined KUSI as a morning anchor in 2004 and later promoted to evening co-anchor in 2010, the journalist produced award-winning stories, became a mentor in the newsroom and became heavily involved in the station’s community outreach through volunteering and speaking engagements.

Although Maas knew for some time that she might not be getting paid fairly, her suspicions were only confirmed in 2017 after her former manager informed her that her male counterpart was taking home at least \$90,000 more than her every year.

When Maas pointed out the pay discrepancies between her and her male co-anchors and asked for a raise, she was not only given the “runaround” but “in fact, they denied [paying him a lot more money than me],” she says.

The lead female anchor elevated the issue to KUSI’s General Manager, Mike McKinnon. In a written complaint, Maas asked for an increase in her annual salary that would “be on par with my evening co-anchor”— something she believed to be a “reasonable request.”

According to the lawsuit, McKinnon’s response was less than favorable, and included — according to the complaint — the mention that he “did not like the tone of [her] email.”

Although Maas did receive a raise when negotiating her 2018 contract, Maas wasn’t satisfied with her raise. “Equal work, equal performance for equal pay. It shouldn’t even be an issue,” Maas tells Yahoo Lifestyle. “Why are we even discussing this in 2019?”

Maas reached out a month before her contract expired, and was stunned when she discovered there would be no negotiation— McKinnon Broadcasting had decided to terminate her instead. KUSI said they have no comment on the litigation at this time and Yahoo Lifestyle’s attempts to reach McKinnon Broadcasting and Mike McKinnon have been unanswered.

“My news director just looked at me and said, ‘We’re bringing in a new generation of people, lots of them.’” Maas recalls of a meeting with her news director and human resources around May 17. “Right then, I knew that this was about last year and bringing in new people that wouldn’t demand equal pay.”

Maas says she was “devastated” to lose the job that she loved so much, during a time that she felt that she was “at the top of her game.” Discovering her fellow female co-workers were also suffering from the same pay inequities, Maas decided that rather than telling other people’s stories, that she would instead tell her own.

On June 13, Maas thanked her colleagues and the San Diego community for the 15 years she had spent working at KUSI. But she ended her farewell broadcast with a hint of what was to come.

“Though I won’t be delivering the news anymore from this anchor chair, I do hope to be making news and making a difference for women in the workplace,” Maas said on the KUSI live broadcast.

On June 25, Gruenberg filed a lawsuit on behalf of Maas against McKinnon Broadcasting Company claiming its failure to provide equal pay to women, gender and age discrimination, failure to prevent discrimination, and retaliation. Due to the “emotional distress” and “loss of earnings,” Maas demands \$10 million in damages and a jury trial.

“We believe we can prove that the station has a long history of paying women less than their male colleagues,” Gruenberg tells Yahoo Lifestyle. “We believe we will win this case.”

While the story has already made waves in the San Diego community, Maas hopes sharing her story will continue to make a change for all women in the workplace.

“This is my story and I want to share what happened to me to put an end to this,” says Maas, adding that she hopes that her daughter will not have to deal with this kind of discrimination.

“Generations of women before me have been dealing with this, but the generations behind me should not have to. I just hope that it will empower other women to do the same, to stand up to this injustice.”

<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/former-anchor-sues-news-station-for-10-million-pay-inequality-211421380.html>