

Ex-Edward Jones broker sues former firm, alleging racial bias

Complaint alleges the firm's policies limit African-Americans' 'income and advancement opportunities'

By **Bruce Kelly** | May 25, 2018 - 1:02 pm EST

A former Edward D. Jones broker sued the firm Thursday, claiming widespread, intentional racial discrimination in the firm's policies and practices.

The ex-broker, Wayne Bland, is African-American and [worked at Jones from 2014 to 2016](#). The lawsuit, which was filed in U.S. District Court in Illinois, alleges that Edward Jones "employs company-wide policies and practices regarding training, compensation, partnerships, and the assignment of territories, business opportunities and sales support that unlawfully segregate its workforce and deny African Americans the income and advancement opportunities because of their race."

Mr. Bland is not currently working in the securities industry, according to his BrokerCheck report.

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The complaint seeks class action status, and Mr. Bland is represented by the law firm Stowell & Friedman, which has successfully sued large Wall Street firms in discrimination cases in the past. For example, in 2013, Merrill Lynch [agreed to pay](#) \$160 million to settle a class-action race discrimination lawsuit; Stowell & Friedman represented those 1,200 Merrill employees.

This new complaint against Edward D. Jones "is consistent with the work we've done against other Wall Street firms," Linda D. Friedman, the founding partner of the firm, said in an interview Friday afternoon. "Wall Street is about 40 years behind in creating workplaces that are equal for women and minorities."

The new lawsuit alleging racial discrimination comes at a time when Edward D. Jones is attempting to become more diverse; the firm [this month](#) tapped a woman, Penny Pennington, to take over as managing partner at the start of next year, and it has said internally that it wants to increase the diversity of its more than 16,000 registered reps and advisers.

This isn't the first lawsuit Mr. Bland has filed against Edward D. Jones. He was one of four former Edward D. Jones employees who sued the firm earlier this year, in March, alleging the firm required adviser trainees to sign unlawful contracts that charged them costs of up to \$75,000 if they left the firm within three years. Prior to working at Edward D. Jones, Mr. Bland had worked for LPL Financial and Vanguard Marketing Corp., according to his BrokerCheck profile.

With regard to the case filed in March, Edward D. Jones disagrees "with the allegations and believe we have complied with all local, state and federal laws related to compensation," company spokesman John Boul said.

On the discrimination claim, the firm "became aware of this complaint only late yesterday," Mr. Boul said. "We are reviewing it and will respond appropriately, but on preliminary review, we strongly disagree with the allegations."

According to the complaint, "Throughout his tenure, Bland was denied resources and business opportunities, including lucrative client accounts, favorable offices and territory, sales and administrative support, and inclusion in favorable broker

teams and pooled accounts, on account of his race."

Mr. Bland "has been treated worse than similarly situated Edward Jones employees who are not African American," the complaint alleges.

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