



11th Circ. Reopens Telemundo Sexual Harassment Claims

By [Chart Riggall](#) · [Listen to article](#)

Law360 (January 22, 2026, 6:59 PM EST) -- The Eleventh Circuit gave new life Thursday to a sexual harassment suit from a former [Telemundo](#) employee who said she faced retribution for reporting what she alleged was her superiors' misconduct, ruling that she "unquestionably" engaged in protected activity amid "humiliating and degrading" treatment.

In an unpublished opinion, a three-judge panel agreed that a Florida federal judge wrongly tossed retaliation claims from Matilde Santana and was too hasty to hand Telemundo early wins on her hostile work environment claims over lewd remarks and unwanted touching from her supervisor.

Santana's complaint, in which she alleged that she lost work opportunities and was denied medical leave over her opposition to the harassment, U.S. Circuit Judge Nancy Abudu wrote, "plausibly alleged retaliatory intent through the narrative as a whole."

As for her claims that were dismissed at the summary judgment stage, the panel continued, Santana appeared to meet every element required for a hostile work environment claim, contrary to the federal district court's findings.

"Viewed together, the pre- and post-notice conduct depicts an environment in which Santana was subjected to persistent, humiliating, and intimidating treatment that materially altered the conditions of her employment," Judge Abudu added.

Santana is a former account executive who worked for an Orlando broadcast station that was acquired by Telemundo, court records show. In her June 2020 complaint, Santana alleges her supervisor sexually harassed her over several years, including remarking on her appearance, making lewd and suggestive comments and touching her inappropriately.

Claiming that the behavior was encouraged by Telemundo's general manager, Santana further alleged another manager made sexually inappropriate advances toward female workers and said a culture of permissiveness pervaded the office.

While she was on medical leave, Santana alleged, her supervisor neglected her customers and attempted to force her to come back to work. She complained about this treatment and suggested it was in retaliation for rejecting her supervisor's sexual advances, although a subsequent Telemundo internal investigation allegedly found no evidence of discrimination.

Initially, a Florida federal judge dismissed Santana's retaliation claims, finding them conclusory and lacking any connection to protected activity. Those claims were tossed again even after Santana filed an amended complaint with further details.

And later in the suit, the court awarded Telemundo and [NBCUniversal Media LLC](#) summary judgment after finding that the harassment wasn't "sufficiently severe or pervasive such that it altered the terms of [Santana's] employment" and that for purposes of Title VII, the alleged perpetrators weren't her actual supervisors.

At [oral arguments](#) in June 2024, Santana's attorney argued that the lower court improperly sided with Telemundo, arguing that supervisors were openly discussing the investigation into her claims and that one of them explicitly told her that he'd "retaliate against any employee that lodged a complaint against him."

"As to establishing a causal connection between what she alleged, we rely upon the fact that she alleged that she had previously been allowed to work from home as a reasonable accommodation prior to her return to work in June 2019," Jonathan Mann of [Schwartz Sladkus Reich Greenberg Atlas](#) said, adding that her work-from-home accommodation was denied after she complained of harassment. "And we know that happened in between about a two-and-a-half month temporal period."

In a footnote to Thursday's opinion, Judge Abudu wrote that while the retaliation claim's

"identification of the relevant decisionmakers was not a model of specificity, the amended complaint nonetheless provided enough factual content ... to make a plausible claim at the motion-to-dismiss stage."

The panel likewise pointed to Telemundo's handling of its internal investigation — where the company sided against Santana, even though it found no reason to disbelieve her claims — as further evidence that it could be held directly liable.

"The persistence of the harassment after this investigation," Judge Abudu added, "supports a finding that the employer's response was neither immediate nor effective."

Counsel for the parties couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

U.S. Circuit Judges Robin S. Rosenbaum, Kevin C. Newsom and Nancy G. Abudu sat on the panel for the Eleventh Circuit.

Santana is represented by Jonathan T. Mann of Schwartz Sladkus Reich Greenberg Atlas LLP and by Mahra Sarofsky of [Ward Damon PL](#).

Telemundo is represented by Jack R. Reiter and Marlene Quintana of [GrayRobinson PA](#).

The case is Santana v. Telemundo Network Group LLC, et al., case number [22-13879](#), in the [U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit](#).

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