

# Axed pizza bar server claims her sex assault complaints were ignored in suit against chef Donatella Arpaia

BYSTEPHEN REX BROWN

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Thursday, October 5, 2017, 6:04 PM

She wants a slice of justice.

A server sued celebrity criminal defense attorney Mark Geragos and Food Network star Donatella Arpaia Thursday, alleging they were liable as owners of the pizza bar in Grand Central Terminal where she was groped.

Carmela Harding said in papers filed in Manhattan Supreme Court that she was wrongly fired from her job in August at Prova Pizzabar after complaining to management about the harassment of a colleague, Kwame Murdock, 30.

She said Murdock created "an extremely hostile and intimidating work environment" where she was subjected to his "sexual advances and sexually charged comments."

The restaurant, which has the slogan "Pizza Enlightened," opened in September of last year. Arpaia, a regular judge on "Iron Chef America," is a co-owner and its public face.

Geragos, a Los Angeles lawyer who has represented Michael Jackson and Winona Ryder, among many others, is a co-owner, papers say.

Harding, 36, said Murdock's advances crossed a line on Aug. 9 when he aggressively grabbed her rear, she alleges in papers. She complained about the encounter to management — and was fired the next day, she says.

An attorney for the pizza bar, Tina Glandian, wrote in a letter included in the lawsuit that Harding was fired for being chronically late and that she did not make any complaint about the groping.

Kwame "vehemently" denied he groped her.

"The scurrilous allegations in the complaint are nothing more than a disgruntled employee's retaliation for her justified termination," Glandian said in a statement.

Harding includes in her suit over a dozen examples of boorish Facebook posts by Murdock as evidence of his attitude about women.

"Avocado is really helping these white girls get thick," reads one post. "Women CAN'T drive," reads another.

Harding's attorney, Brian Schaffer, said she was bringing a retaliation claim for threats made by the pizza bar's attorney to dissuade her from filing suit.

Harding seeks damages to be determined at trial.