

## Demoted GM executive sues, alleging age bias

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A demoted General Motors executive has filed an age-discrimination lawsuit against the company, saying it is pushing out older, highly qualified executives in its haste to build a leaner, younger company after its 2009 bankruptcy.

"I love General Motors," Daniel Plouffe, 58, a 40-year veteran of the company, said Monday, three days after filing the potential class action in Wayne County Circuit Court. "I'm bringing this age-discrimination suit action because it's the right thing to do -- for me, my family, as well as my GM peers who have been severely affected by GM's conduct."

GM spokesman Jay Cooney wouldn't discuss the specifics of the lawsuit but said the company denies any wrongdoing.

"GM has a longstanding anti-discrimination policy that's well ensconced within the company," he said.

Plouffe, who lives in Grosse Pointe Shores and works at GM headquarters in Detroit,

is director of GM's dealer business-to-business systems unit, which operates the computer system by which dealers order cars and parts and communicate with the company.

His lawsuit says that when GM emerged from bankruptcy in 2009, it embarked on a campaign to replace older executives with those under 50 by encouraging older executives to retire.

Many of those who didn't retire were demoted out of the executive ranks with no chance of being considered for future promotions, regardless of their qualifications.

Plouffe, who has worked for GM since 1971, said he was demoted to a level 9 position, resulting in a 20%-25% pay cut, even though he assumed the responsibilities of three other executives who left.

He said a succession of GM officials told him that he was being demoted because



the company wants to promote younger people -- those under 50 -- even though his last performance evaluation said he far exceeds expectations.

His lawyer, Royal Oak employment attorney Michael Pitt, said GM has joined the ranks of other companies which, in their quest to streamline, have mistakenly assumed that younger people are more qualified than older, seasoned executives.

Pitt asked Wayne County Circuit Judge Daphne Means Curtis to certify the lawsuit as a class action, order GM to reinstate Plouffe and other similarly situated employees to executive positions and restore lost pay and benefits.

The suit is the latest spawned by GM's emergence from bankruptcy. In May, more than 100 former executives sued in federal court to restore pension benefits cut by its bankruptcy.

Legal experts said Plouffe could face a daunting task to prevail against GM.

"If GM decided it was top-heavy in the management ranks and wanted to thin them out to save money or to be more efficient, that would not by itself violate job discrimination laws," said Wayne State University employment law professor Kingsley Browne.

He said older employees tend to get the ax in corporate streamlining. To prevail, Plouffe must prove that the decision was based on age, rather than cost-cutting involving highly paid employees.