


Deborah Dugan Files Complaint Against Recording Academy Over Ouster

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Dugan says she was put on leave because she threatened to take legal action over alleged misconduct including sexual harassment by the Recording Academy's general counsel Joel Katz and being asked to hire ex-CEO Neil Portnow as a consultant despite a rape allegation from a recording artist.

Deborah Dugan on Tuesday filed an explosive sexual harassment and discrimination complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences after being placed on administrative leave amid allegations of workplace bullying — and, in it, she also claims the Academy's board manipulates the Grammy nomination process.

The Recording Academy on Thursday announced Dugan had been placed on leave from her post as president, telling *Billboard* it hired two independent third-party investigators to look into concerns that had been raised to its board of trustees. Dugan's lawyer Bryan Freedman told *The Hollywood Reporter* that his client's ability to respond was "restrained by a 28-page contract and legal threats."

In the EEOC complaint, Dugan alleges that on Dec. 22 she told HR she had been sexually harassed by music lawyer Joel Katz, who is the Academy's general counsel and a former board member. (Katz's reps haven't yet responded to a request for comment.)

Dugan also says she told HR she was asked to hire former CEO Neil Portnow as a consultant and pay him \$750,000 despite his bowing away from the Academy "in disgrace after making misogynistic remarks about woman recording artists." She also says the real reason Portnow's contract wasn't renewed is that he's accused of raping a female performer and she alleges that the complaints made against her to the board came from Portnow's executive assistant.

The email also complained of "egregious conflicts of interest, improper self-dealing by Board members and voting irregularities with respect to nominations for Grammy Awards," according to the complaint, which describes the Academy as "a 'boys' club' network where men work together to the disadvantage of women and disenfranchised groups in order to line their own pockets and maintain a firm grip of control on the Academy's dealings."

Dugan put the Academy on notice that she intended to bring claims and alleges the organization backed out of a nearly-closed settlement and gave her one hour to accept its new offer before putting her on leave. The complaint acknowledges that the allegations

against Dugan were made prior to her complaint to HR, but also notes she wasn't put on leave until after she shared her intent to pursue legal action. Now, she says, the board and interim president Harvey Mason Jr. are defaming her.

Also interesting, especially given the Grammy Awards ceremony is set to be held Sunday, is Dugan's characterization of the nominations process. She says submissions are initially voted on by the 12,000 members of the Academy, then the top 20 selections are reviewed by "secret committees" chosen by the board chair and head of awards Bill Freimuth. The committees are tasked with narrowing the 20 potential nominees down to between five to eight, depending on the category.

Dugan alleges the board pushes "artists with whom they have relationships" — sometimes even adding in artists who didn't make the top 20 — lets artists who are in consideration for a nomination to sit on the committee that votes for their category and manipulates the process to ensure certain songs are nominated if Grammys producer Ken Ehrlich wants them performed during the show.

Another of Dugan's attorneys, Douglas Wigdor, who represents 20 women accusing Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct, on Tuesday announced the EEOC complaint on Twitter — and compared the Recording Academy to the embattled film mogul.

"The complaint that we filed today against the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (the Grammys) highlights tactics reminiscent of those deployed by individuals defending Harvey Weinstein," writes Wigdor on Twitter. "As we allege, the attempt by the Recording Academy to impugn the character of Deborah Dugan is a transparent effort to shift the focus away from its own unlawful activity. This blatant form of retaliation in corporate America is all too common, even post #MeToo, and we will utilize all lawful means necessary to ensure that those responsible are held accountable for their actions."

Dugan's claims include unlawful gender discrimination, sexual harassment, unlawful retaliation and unequal pay. (Read the full complaint, below.)

The Recording Academy did not respond to specific allegations in Dugan's complaint, but reiterated its position that Dugan didn't raise the issues until after claims that she had created a "toxic and intolerable" work environment were made against her. The statement reads, in part: "[W]e immediately launched independent investigations to review both Ms. Dugan's potential misconduct and her subsequent allegations. Both of these investigations remain ongoing. ... Our loyalty will always be to the 21,000 members of the Recording Industry. We regret that Music's Biggest Night is being stolen from them by Ms. Dugan's actions and we are working to resolve the matter as quickly as possible."