

Recording Academy CEO Files Discrimination Complaint Days Before Grammy Awards

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The chief executive of the Recording Academy, who has been on leave involuntarily since last week, filed a discrimination complaint alleging that the group's general counsel sexually harassed her and that its board of directors improperly influences nominations for the Grammy Awards.

In a filing with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission five days before the awards show, Deborah Dugan said she was placed on leave as retaliation for raising such issues.

The Academy last week said it placed Ms. Dugan on leave because of a subordinate's allegation that she had engaged in misconduct. A longtime assistant to Ms. Dugan's predecessor, Neil Portnow, filed a formal allegation about Ms. Dugan's management style, according to the complaint.

Ms. Dugan's complaint on Tuesday alleges that the assistant's complaint was a pretext for pushing her aside in retaliation for raising concerns with the Academy's human-resources department. Ms. Dugan said she told human resources that the Academy's board members had engaged in a variety of misconduct, such as collecting unduly generous benefits and conflicts of interest that affected Grammy voting.

Ms. Dugan's complaint says she was sexually harassed by Joel Katz, an attorney at the law firm Greenberg Traurig and general counsel to the Academy. Mr. Katz, she alleges, invited her to a private dinner where he repeatedly called her "baby," made inappropriate comments about her appearance and tried to kiss her. She also said he and his firm are paid "an exorbitant amount of money by the Academy," including a \$250,000 retainer.

Howard Weitzman, a lawyer for Mr. Katz, said Ms. Dugan's allegations "are false and Mr. Katz categorically and emphatically denies her version of that evening."

Ms. Dugan said she was paid substantially less than her two male predecessors. She also said she was asked by the board to hire Mr. Portnow as a consultant for \$750,000.

Mr. Portnow couldn't be reached for comment.

The complaint also alleges that the board manipulates awards nominations to ensure certain songs or albums are nominated based on performances the telecast's producer wants during the show.

"It is curious that Ms. Dugan never raised these grave allegations until a week after legal claims were made against her personally by a female employee who alleged Ms. Dugan had created a 'toxic and intolerable' work environment and engaged in 'abusive and bullying conduct,'" the Academy said in a statement Tuesday. It reiterated that it had launched independent investigations to review Ms. Dugan's potential misconduct and her own allegations, a step it disclosed last week.

The Academy said Ms. Dugan was placed on administrative leave only after offering to step down and demanding \$22 million from the Academy.

Ms. Dugan's lawyers, Douglas Wigdor and Michael Willemin, responded, saying she repeatedly raised concerns throughout her tenure at the Academy, and that others, including artists, board members and employees have raised the same concerns.

"The Academy has lost its way and abandoned the recording industry, instead focusing on self-dealing and turning [a] blind eye to the 'boys' club' environment, obvious improprieties and conflicts of interest," they said in a statement.

They also said the Academy offered Ms. Dugan millions of dollars to drop her allegations and depart from the Academy. When she refused, they said, she was put on leave.