

# Grammys Chief Rips Racist and Sexist Academy's 'Boys' Club' in Filed Complaint

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After Grammy chief Deborah Dugan was removed from her position just ten days before the ceremony, employees within the organization told reporters that it might have been a “coup” connected to Dugan trying to reorganize and repair the Recording Academy following accusations of racism and misogyny. Now, according to a messy and revealing 44-page complaint Dugan filed on Tuesday with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, she’s revealing to what extent the Academy needs an overhaul, alleging sexual harassment, voting irregularities and conflicts of interest, and the allegation that former Grammy chief Neil Portnow raped an artist.

The complaint alleges that even though the Academy told press that Dugan was fired because a misconduct claim had been filed by a female member of staff, Dugan notes in her filing that she was only fired after she wrote a memo to HR outlining conflicts of self interest among board members and calling out the organization for being a “boys’ club.”

Dugan also alleges that after taking over Portnow’s job following his comments that women need to “step up” at the Grammys to win awards, she discovered he had been accused of rape by a “foreign” artist who was also a member of the Academy. This artist accused Portnow of raping her after a performance she gave at Carnegie Hall. After this allegation was brought to Dugan the Board asked that she hire him as a consultant for \$750,000 a year, which she refused. Dugan also alleges she was offered significantly less compensation for the position than what Portnow received.

The complaint also gives light to the nomination and awards process for the Grammys and how deeply white and male these voting bodies can be. The complaint points out that in December 2019, the Task Force assembled to overhaul diversity in the Academy found that “biases affecting women, people of color and LGBTQ creators in the music business are deeply ingrained” and between “2012 and the present, the Board has been approximately 68% male and 69% Caucasian.”

But the complaint also alleges that voting process is extremely corrupt. Submissions are assembled via the votes of 12,000 members, but then the top 20 selections are made by “secret committees” on which board members sit. But Dugan points out in the complaint that board members with conflicts of interest then push for artists they have relationships with. The complaint reads:

To make matters worse, the Board is permitted to simply add in artists for nominations who did not even make the initial 20-artist list. Naturally, the members of the Board and the secret committees chose artists with whom they have personal or business relationships. This year, 30 artists that were not selected by the membership were added to the possible nomination list.

Moreover, in an outrageous conflict of interest, the Board has selected artists who are under consideration for a nomination to sit on the committee that is voting for the category for which that have been nominated. As a result, one artist who initially ranked 18 out of 20 in the 2019 “Song of the Year” category ended up with a nomination. This artist was actually permitted to sit on the “Song of the Year” nomination committee. Incredibly, this artist is also represented by a member of the Board.

That meant that, the complaint alleges, “high caliber artists who could have taken home the award in a specific category have, at times, not been nominated at all.” It alleges that Ed Sheeran and Ariana Grande, though being voted for by members, missed out on 2019 nominations because “the aforementioned artist who ranked 18 out of 20 was nominated instead. And if the producer of the Grammys Ken Ehrlich wants a specific song performed during the show, the complaint alleges that the Board manipulates the nominations to make sure those songs or albums are nominated. Whew!

The complaint also outlines a workplace rife with harassment and racism. It alleges that Dugan was sexually harassed by the Academy’s general counsel Joel Katz, insisting on a dinner alone where he called her “baby,” commented on her looks, and attempted to kiss Dugan. On Wednesday Katz responded to the complaint, telling Deadline that he “categorically and emphatically denies her version of that evening.”

The complaint cites other instances of sexual harassment and discrimination experienced by other women at the company, including a CIO who was harassed by a board member and forced to resign who told Dugan, “if you open your mouth, you’re gone.” Another example describes how colleagues of a black, gay temp hung up “a demeaning picture depicting him as a caricature with huge exaggerated lips” after which “he had a mental breakdown.”

For years the Recording Academy and the Grammys have been accused of discrimination and sexism, with Portnow’s comments in 2018 a revealing slip of the tongue as to how the Academy really feels about women. But Dugan’s complaint is sure to open the flood gates when it comes to dissecting the immense racism and sexism that has long run through the Academy, which has operated in secrecy for too long.