Complaint of Discrimination and Retaliation Against TikTok

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On February 8th, 2024, Wigdor filed a complaint of discrimination and retaliation against TikTok Inc. and ByteDance Ltd. on behalf of Katie Puris, the former Global Head of Brand & Creative at TikTok, who was responsible for the brand's most recognizable and award-winning marketing campaigns. As alleged, despite being extraordinarily successful at the Company and one of the most senior female executives in the United States, Ms. Puris was subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and ultimately terminated because TikTok executives, including Lidong Zhang, the Chairman of ByteDance, felt that Ms. Puris lacked the docility and meekness specifically required of women employed by TikTok. Lidong Zhang and other male executives believe strongly in maintaining what they considered to be the "proper" way for women to behave in the workplace, including never openly celebrating and advocating for your team's success – a strict standard that male employees were not expected to follow.

As Ms. Puris neared 50 years old, the discriminatory treatment only increased as Company executives made clear that they preferred young, less experienced employees who they believed to be more innovative, pliable, and better able to work the brutal hours required. Given TikTok's lack of concern for the well-being of employees, it is not surprising that, as the Complaint details, when Ms. Puris reported sexual harassment at an off-site Company event, TikTok failed to respond appropriately, forcing Ms. Puris to choose between her own safety and work opportunities. When the Company's discriminatory treatment began to physically and emotionally affect Ms. Puris in a life-altering manner, TikTok did not even afford her the time to properly care for herself. Instead, after Ms. Puris made protected complaints about the discriminatory treatment, her team was substantially reduced, she received a devastatingly low performance review, she was denied her annual bonus, and she was ultimately unlawfully terminated.

Statement from Wigdor LLP: "For three years, Ms. Puris devoted almost every waking hour to TikTok. She created award-winning campaigns while building and managing a large international team of employees. By all metrics, she was enormously successful at her job and created a successful team. Yet, when she began complaining about the discriminatory treatment she received and the Company's failure to properly handle her sexual harassment complaint, she swiftly suffered retaliatory consequences that resulted in her unlawful termination. TikTok's actions against Ms. Puris are illegal and we look forward to vindicating her rights."

Statement from Katie Puris: "As a woman who started her career in 1995, I was taught to be quiet if I wanted to be successful. Gender discrimination and sexual harassment were commonplace, but speaking out was career suicide. Wisdom has taught me that I no longer need to be silenced or afraid to fight for change."

Any questions can be directed to attorney Monica Hincken (mhincken@wigdorlaw.com) or Communications Manager Courtney Cormican (ccormican@wigdorlaw.com).

1.26.26 Law360

2.8.24 Law360

2.8.24 Bloomberg

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2.8.24 Financial Times

2.8.24 Fortune

2.8.24 The Wrap

2.8.24 Business Insider