Litigation Against TikTok / ByteDance

May 6, 2024 • News & Press

On May 6th, Wigdor LLP, on behalf of our client Katie Puris, filed an amended complaint (HERE) of discrimination and retaliation against TikTok Inc., Bytedance Ltd., Bytedance, Inc., Douyin LTD and Lidong Zhang, the Chairman of ByteDance, China. Ms. Puris' initial lawsuit, which received widespread press attention, was filed back in February 2024. The initial suit, filed only against TikTok, Inc., and ByteDance LTD, alleged that Ms. Puris was sexually harassed, discriminated against on the basis of gender, age and disability, and fired because she had the courage to complain internally about this unlawful conduct.

As alleged in the filing, after the initial complaint was filed, in an effort to get Ms. Puris to dismiss ByteDance LTD from this action, TikTok claimed that Ms. Puris was not employed by ByteDance LTD. Today's filing alleges that this representation was false and seemingly made in order to stay consistent with TikTok's ongoing efforts to convince the United States Congress and the public at large that TikTok, and the TikTok product, are not controlled by ByteDance LTD, a company founded and headquartered in China (and which has been ordered by the U.S. government to sell TikTok).

The amended complaint (HERE), which gives a behind the scenes look into one of the world's most influential companies, contains hundreds of new allegations and dozens of screenshots of text and Lark conversations and meetings, as well as quotations from conversations that collectively allege that ByteDance LTD was Mr. Puris' employer given that its leadership (in particular, Yiming Zhang (founder and former CEO), Rubo Liang (CEO) and Lidong Zhang) was and continues to remain in control over TikTok's entire business, even small tactical decisions, hiring and firing, performance reviews, compensation, etc. To that end, the amended complaint alleges that TikTok's CEO, Shou Zi Chew, is nothing more than a conduit for the Chinese based leadership, from whom he takes orders.

The allegations are too numerous to list in this email, but are summarized in the amended complaint's preliminary statement, which also includes certain photos and references to paragraphs containing other photos. The screenshots on page 7 alone allege that Yiming Zhang (after he allegedly stepped away from the company), Rubo Liang and Lidong Zhang were heavily involved in the decision to terminate Nick Tran, TikTok's former Head of Marketing and Ms. Puris' supervisor at the time, and that Mr. Chew simply capitulated to their desires in connection with that decision.

Read the amended complaint here.

As told to Ms. Puris earlier this year by a current U.S. based senior leader, "Everything you experienced, we've all experienced. Yeah, you were just on the front end. I know. It just got more and more Chinese . . . And they're just turning the screws more and more . . . Yeah. Yeah. You know, they put in leaders that dictate the way they want out of China."

ON THE RECORD STATEMENT OF MICHAEL J. WILLEMIN, PARTNER, WIGDOR LLP

"It is unconscionable that ByteDance LTD would attempt to avoid liability in this matter. As alleged in the

amended complaint, the treatment suffered by Ms. Puris was directed by the leadership of ByteDance LTD, which continues to hold a firm grip on TikTok's operations globally and in the United States. We look forward to sending a message that companies and individuals cannot skirt liability for their unlawful conduct by playing a shell game with corporate entities and executive titles."

ON THE RECORD STATEMENT OF KATIE PURIS

"I believe this lawsuit is the first time TikTok and Bytedance in China have been sued in federal court for their harsh discriminatory treatment of employees.

This is a call to action for change.

To all employees of TikTok & Bytedance in the US, globally and equally based in China: please read the full federal filing as it includes proof of what I endured that may be helpful to you. Filing this action was necessary for me, and I hope that others can benefit from the allegations and images contained in the filing.

To those who lead corporations across the globe: please read this filing as proof of the reality that discrimination has evolved to survive, and it still exits. Please be vigilant about ensuring that corporate policies and practices not only reflect zero tolerance for discrimination and other damaging behavior, but also that they are adhered to without exception. Believe and lead.

To TikTok, Bytedance and Lidong Zhang: Two roads diverged in a wood, and the path you take can make all the difference. You can and must do better."

Any questions can be directed to attorney Michael J. Willemin (mwillemin@wigdorlaw.com).

NOTE: Wigdor filed a second amended complaint on behalf of our client on August 21, 2024. The find the second amended complaint in Puris v. TikTok Inc.; Bytedance Ltd.; Bytedance Inc.; Douyin Co., Ltd.; and Lidong Zhang.

Press Coverage:

- National Law Journal
- Forbes
- Fortune
- Associated Press
- CNN
- Financial Times
- Reuters
- Deadline
- Axios