

Adam Neumann demoted his chief of staff for being pregnant, according to a new complaint against the ousted CEO and WeWork

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Meghan Morris 1 hour ago

- Adam Neumann's former chief of staff has filed a complaint saying that the ousted CEO, WeWork, and the company's current chief operating officer discriminated against her for being pregnant.
- In a complaint filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in New York, Medina Bardhi said she was demoted following each of her pregnancies and that her male replacements made substantially more money.
- While Bardhi was pregnant, she flew on a private plane where Neumann and others smoked marijuana, according to the complaint.
- WeWork said in a statement that it intends to vigorously defend itself against the claim.
- [For more stories about WeWork, click here.](#)

Adam Neumann's right-hand woman said in a complaint filed on Thursday that she had to fly in a private plane while the then-WeWork CEO and executives smoked marijuana while she was pregnant.

In a filing with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in New York, Medina Bardhi said that she was discriminated against by WeWork, Neumann, and chief operating officer Jennifer Berrent over the course of years, including around two pregnancies.

The complaint said Bardhi's treatment was part of a larger pattern of WeWork discriminating against women employees.

The company plans to fight the EEOC complaint, per a spokeswoman.

"WeWork intends to vigorously defend itself against this claim. We have zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind. We are committed to moving the company forward and building a company and culture that our employees can be proud of," a WeWork spokeswoman said in a statement.

A representative for Neumann did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Bardhi said she was asked about her plans to become pregnant as far back as her October 2013 interview for the role of Neumann's chief of staff. She said in the complaint that when she returned from two maternity leaves, most recently earlier this year, she was demoted

both times, moved offices, and her male replacements made significantly more money.

Bardhi started working with Neumann in 2005. She was laid off from WeWork in early October, part of cuts following Neumann's ouster that saw most of his support staff leave. According to the complaint, Bardhi had started raising concerns about pregnancy and maternity leave-related discrimination weeks before her termination.

The complaint described a work environment where female employees were demeaned for taking maternity leave, and where more qualified women commonly earned less than their male colleagues.

Two other women employees have filed suit against WeWork in recent years, both of which include claims about pay inequality. One suit said an employee was sexually assaulted at two company events and the other, which was dropped in mid-September, alleged gender discrimination and retaliation.

According to Bardhi's complaint, in late March a female executive who was four weeks into her maternity leave came in for a meeting with Neumann and now-co-CEO Artie Minson. There, she was told she was no longer continuing in her executive role. Fearing she would lose her job, she came back after six weeks of leave, "without a clear role or job responsibilities," and then left the company, the complaint said.

Pregnancy as a 'problem' that needed 'to be fixed'

Neumann repeatedly called Bardhi's maternity leave "retirement" and "vacation" in front of other employees, the complaint said.

During her first pregnancy, Neumann replaced Bardhi, who made \$150,000 a year, with a male chief of staff who was offered \$400,000 with a \$175,000 signing bonus, according to the complaint.

When she returned from maternity leave, the chief of staff took her office while she shared a table with Neumann's other staff, Bardhi said in the complaint. She, along with other employees, struggled to pump because the lactation room was "inexcusably unsanitary," with no scheduling system for the 5-10 employees who needed to use it, the complaint said.

The complaint said that eventually, the male chief of staff moved roles and Bardhi got her job back. But when she was pregnant for the second time, Neumann again looked for a permanent replacement for her role. They found another man who moved into her office as soon as he heard she was giving birth.

Eventually, a former business analyst at Goldman Sachs took the chief of staff job, and when Bardhi returned from maternity leave, she had no clear role or "meaningful work" for months, according to the complaint.

She then was assigned to oversee the account for employees to message Neumann.

The complaint said that Bardhi raised concerns with multiple executives, including Chris Hill, WeWork's chief product officer and Neumann's brother-in-law.

The problem wasn't just Neumann, per the complaint. Jennifer Berrent, currently the firm's chief legal officer and a longtime part of Neumann's inner circle, "referred to Ms. Bardhi's pregnancy as a 'problem' that needed 'a solution' and 'to be fixed,' and she repeatedly worked with Mr. Neumann to permanently replace Ms. Bardhi," the complaint said.

On a 2015 plane ride from Mexico City to New York, executives drunk on tequila joked about sexual acts that left Bardhi "feeling disgusted," her complaint said.

The complaint said Neumann's pattern of harassment continued through the lead-up to WeWork's initial public offering, which was ultimately shelved. In a car ride from JPMorgan's office, Neumann "denigrated Ms. Bardhi for having taken maternity leave" in front of his personal assistant, the complaint said.

According to the complaint, after Neumann stepped down as CEO, Bardhi was told on a call with Minson and two HR employees that she was being terminated because there was no role for her following Neumann's departure.

Now, Bardhi's asking the EEOC to investigate her claims of discrimination and retaliation against WeWork's female employees.

New York-based attorney Douglas Wigdor is representing her.

The EEOC will investigate and decide if discrimination occurred, at which time the parties could resolve the case through an informal process with the EEOC. If the case is still not resolved, the EEOC can file a lawsuit, and if the agency does not, it would give Bardhi the right to sue.