

WeWork and former CEO Adam Neumann accused of gender discrimination

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A former top deputy to WeWork founder Adam Neumann is accusing him and the office-sharing company of pregnancy and gender discrimination.

The former WeWork employee, Medina Bardhi, claims in a lawsuit that she was harassed and demoted after she told Neumann, who was recently ousted as the company's CEO, of her first pregnancy. Bardhi, who was Neumann's chief of staff, also alleges she was replaced by a less-qualified male employee after going on maternity leave following the birth of her second child.

The suit, which seeks class-action status, claims female employees at WeWork are regularly paid less for the same work than male employees. Bardhi said the male employee who replaced her while she was on maternity leave received three times her level of pay for the same job.

In a statement, WeWork denied the allegations. "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," the company said.

Neumann could not be reached for comment.

Bardhi is suing Neumann, along with the company and WeWork's chief legal officer, Jennifer Berrent. In the suit, Bardhi alleges that Neumann referred to maternity leave as "vacation" and "retirement" and made disparaging comments about her pregnancy-related weight gain to her and other WeWork employees.

Neumann gave up his role of CEO of WeWork in September after the company's postponed initial public offering, along with mounting financial losses, left WeWork in a severe cash crunch. The company was reportedly weeks away from running out of cash until it was bailed out this month by its largest investor, Japanese firm Softbank.

As part of his exit package, the 40-year-old Neumann received more than \$1 billion in compensation, including a \$185 million consulting contract.

Bardhi left WeWork in early October, according to the complaint. In June, WeWork was sued by another former female executive for alleged gender discrimination and equal pay violations.

"It is astonishing that WeWork could reward Adam Neumann's blatant sexist behavior with a staggering and unprecedented golden parachute worth over a reported \$1 billion, while the company has subjected Ms. Bardhi and other women to repeated and systematic marginalization, lesser pay than their male colleagues, and retaliation for having the courage to raise legitimate complaints of gender and pregnancy discrimination," Bardhi's lawyer, Douglas Wigdor, said in a statement.