

Suspended Grammy boss Deborah Dugan says she was sexually harassed by former chairman who called her 'baby' and tried to kiss her

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By Nancy
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Grammy boss Deborah Dugan is finally voicing her side, saying she was suspended last week in the run-up to Sunday's ceremony after complaining she was sexually harassed.

In an explosive filing with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Dugan said that contrary to some reports, she was sidelined over a Dec. 22 email to human resources that alleged Joel Katz, the Recording Academy's general counsel and former chair, tried to kiss her at a business dinner last year.

The email also claimed another board chairman pressured Dugan to hire former CEO Neil Portnow as a \$750,000 consultant despite his exit last year amid a furor over sexist comments and an alleged sexual assault.

In her filing, Dugan said Portnow "allegedly raped a female recording artist, which was, upon information and belief, the real reason his contract was not renewed."

Portnow, 71, did not immediately respond to a voicemail and text message from the Daily News seeking comment.

In her Dec. 22 email included as an exhibit, Dugan claimed Katz invited her to a one-on-one dinner last year, ordered an "outlandishly expensive bottle of wine," told her she was pretty and repeatedly called her "Baby."

She said the lawyer lamented his failed marriage, said he was lonely and suggested traveling together to his various homes "could be something nice for us to share."

"At the conclusion of dinner, he leaned forward, lips pursed, as to kiss me. I quickly turned and made my way out of the restaurant," Dugan wrote.

"Mr. Katz's comments about my looks and suggestive remarks have continued unabated since our first meeting at the restaurant in May," she said.

The Recording Academy responded to Dugan's filing by saying her Dec. 22 email came shortly after a female employee complained about her management style.

"It is curious that Ms. Dugan never raised these grave allegations until a week after legal claims were made against her personally by a female employee who alleged Ms. Dugan had

created a 'toxic and intolerable' work environment and engaged in 'abusive and bullying conduct,'" the Academy said.

"When Ms. Dugan did raise her 'concerns' to HR, she specifically instructed HR 'not to take any action' in response," the statement said.

"Nonetheless, we immediately launched independent investigations to review both Ms. Dugan's potential misconduct and her subsequent allegations. Both of these investigations remain ongoing," the statement said.

"Ms. Dugan was placed on administrative leave only after offering to step down and demanding \$22 million from the Academy, which is a not-for-profit organization," the statement continued. "Our loyalty will always be to the 25,000 members of the recording industry. We regret that Music's Biggest Night is being stolen from them by Ms. Dugan's actions and we are working to resolve the matter as quickly as possible."

Dugan's lawyers Douglas Wigdor and Michael Willemin were quick to return fire later Tuesday in a follow-up response to the Academy statement.

"As the charge filed today clearly alleges, the assertion that Ms. Dugan did not raise concerns prior to the accusations manufactured against her is completely false. Ms. Dugan repeatedly raised concerns throughout her entire tenure at the Academy and even gave large presentations focused on diversity and inclusion at board meetings," the lawyers said.

"The Academy has lost its way and abandoned the recording industry, instead focusing on self-dealing and turning (a) blind eye to the 'boy's club' environment, obvious improprieties and conflicts of interest," they said.

"On the morning of the day she was put on leave, the Academy offered Ms. Dugan millions of dollars to drop all of this and leave the Academy. The board chair demanded an answer within the hour. When Ms. Dugan refused to accept and walk away, she was put on leave," they said.

The star-studded Grammy Awards are set to take place Sunday night at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.