

Recording Academy Head Files Complaint After Being Placed on 'Administrative Leave' Days Before Grammys

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Deborah Dugan, the president and CEO of the Recording Academy, is now suing after being placed on administrative leave just days before the 2020 Grammy Awards, according to statements obtained by PEOPLE.

The Recording Academy said that the administrative leave comes after an allegation of misconduct by a senior female member of the organization. Recording Academy Board Chair Harvey Mason Jr. will serve as interim president and CEO.

"In light of concerns raised to the Recording Academy Board of Trustees, including a formal allegation of misconduct by a senior female member of the Recording Academy team, the board has placed Recording Academy President and CEO Deborah Dugan on administrative leave, effective immediately," the Recording Academy's statement read. "The board has also retained two independent third-party investigators to conduct independent investigations of the allegations."

"The board determined this action to be necessary in order to restore the confidence of the Recording Academy's membership, repair Recording Academy employee morale, and allow the Recording Academy to focus on its mission of serving all music creators," the statement continued. "The Recording Academy Board of Trustees is committed to fostering a safe, diverse, and inclusive workplace, music industry, and society."

An attorney for Dugan denies the misconduct allegation.

"What has been reported is not nearly the story that needs to be told," Bryan J. Freedman of Freedman + Taitelman, LLP told PEOPLE in a statement. "When our ability to speak is not restrained by a 28-page contract and legal threats, we will expose what happens when you 'step up' at the Recording Academy, a public nonprofit."

On Tuesday, Dugan's new legal representation Douglas H. Wigdor and Michael J. Willemin filed a claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission alleging unlawful gender discrimination, sexual harassment, unlawful retaliation and unequal pay by the Academy, according to documents obtained by PEOPLE.

"The complaint that we filed today against the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (the Grammys) highlights tactics reminiscent of those deployed by individuals defending Harvey Weinstein," Wigdor and Willemin said in a statement. "As we allege, the attempt by the Recording Academy to impugn the character of Deborah Dugan is a transparent effort to shift the focus away from its own unlawful activity. This blatant form of

retaliation in corporate America is all too common, even post #MeToo, and we will utilize all lawful means necessary to ensure that those responsible are held accountable for their actions.”

The Recording Academy denied the allegations contained in the filing. “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’. When Ms. Dugan did raise her ‘concerns’ to HR, she specifically instructed HR ‘not to take any action’ in response,” the organization told *Rolling Stone* in a statement.

“Nonetheless, we immediately launched independent investigations to review both Ms. Dugan’s potential misconduct and her subsequent allegations. Both of these investigations remain ongoing. 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. Our loyalty will always be to the 21,000 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,” continues the 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,” Wigdor and Willemin said in an additional statement. “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. In addition, it is not just Ms. Dugan who has raised concerns. As alleged in the charge, artists, other board members and employees have all raised virtually all of the concerns raised by Ms. Dugan. As alleged, the Academy has lost its way and abandoned the recording industry, instead focusing on self-dealing and turning blind eye to the “boys’ club” environment, obvious improprieties and conflicts of interest.”

The statement continued, “It was never Ms. Dugan’s intention to turn this into a public fight precisely because of her love for music and the members of the recording industry. Unfortunately, staying silent was made impossible by the Board’s repeated leaks and disclosures of false and misleading information to the press.”

It concluded, “Finally, as alleged in the charge, 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. The Academy claimed that Ms. Dugan was put on leave based on accusations made against her over a month prior that the Board knows very well are meritless. That is not a credible story.”

Dugan had been the head of the Recording Academy for just five months after being appointed in August 2019. She became the first female president and CEO of the organization last year, following allegations of gender bias against the Recording Academy, and after former president Neil Portnow stepped down in July 2019.

Portnow had received backlash for saying female artists need to “step up” following a controversial male-dominated Grammy Awards in 2018. (He later went on to apologize for his comments.)

Dugan was previously the CEO of AIDS organization RED and also worked as the president of Disney Publishing Worldwide.