

Biglaw Partner Accused Of Sexual Harassment By Former Grammys CEO

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By Kathryn Rubino

Greenberg Traurig partner Joel Katz is the center of a new sexual harassment Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint. The Biglaw partner, who also previously served as the former chair of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences Academy's board and who continues to serve as the Academy's outside general counsel, faces allegations from Deborah Dugan, the first woman to serve as the Academy's president and CEO who was placed on administrative leave.

According to the complaint, during a May 2019 business dinner Katz repeatedly called Dugan "baby" and made comments on her appearance. Additionally, the complaint alleges Katz made overtures to Dugan, saying they should spend time together" and travel to one of his "many homes." The complaint alleges that despite Dugan's lack of interest in Katz's advances, he still attempted to kiss her at the end of the meal.

But that incident was not the end of Katz's allegedly inappropriate behavior towards Dugan:

Despite the fact that Ms. Dugan rejected all of Mr. Katz's advances, he continued to act inappropriately towards her.

Indeed, in every one-on-one conversation Ms. Dugan had with Mr. Katz following the May 18, 2019, dinner, he told her that she was pretty and referred to her as "baby."

Dugan says she complained to Human Resources in an email on December 22, 2019 about the harassment she alleges she endured, which notes a "'boys' club' mentality and approach to governance at the Academy." Three weeks later, Dugan was put on leave:

Only three weeks after sending her complaint to HR, on January 16, 2020 Ms. Dugan was put on administrative leave by the members of the Board's Executive Committee. The decision to put Ms. Dugan on leave was clearly made in retaliation for her complaint, and came with thinly veiled threats of termination in the event that Ms. Dugan persisted in pursuing claims against the Academy.

In public statements about Dugan's suspension, the Recording Academy pointed to alleged allegations made against Dugan saying she was released "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 complaint characterizes this explanation for her departure as “completely false and defamatory... designed to retaliate against Ms. Dugan, threaten her, and malign her reputation.”

As reported by Law.com, Greenberg Traurig executive chairman, Richard Rosenbaum, issued a statement on the allegations calling Katz “legendary in the music industry” and said he helped the Academy “achieve previously unprecedented business results.” Rosenbaum also spoke about the allegations:

“The personal allegations recently made were not previously known to us and, if true, would of course offend our culture and values.” Rosenbaum said. “But our values also require a full and fair investigation before conclusions are reached. We understand this investigation is being conducted by the Academy and await the results.”

The Academy had its own statement that it had “immediately launched independent investigations to review both Ms. Dugan’s potential misconduct and her subsequent allegations. Both of these investigations remain ongoing.”