

Former Grammys Chief Deborah Dugan Files New Charges Against Recording Academy

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She says she has been subjected to "repeated, ongoing, and egregious retaliation" and provides emails showing board members were also concerned over the award nomination process.

One day after the Recording Academy fired its embattled president and CEO **Deborah Dugan**, she responded on Tuesday (March 3) with a filing to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) providing evidence that she says shows board members were also concerned about irregularities in the Grammy voting process.

Dugan contends that since she voiced concerns over irregularities and conflicts of interest in the Grammy voting process, she has been portrayed by the academy in the media as misrepresenting the facts. But she says the concerns are legitimate and backed up her claims with emails from board members making similar statements.

One board member, who was not named, emailed both Dugan and interim Recording Academy CEO **Harvey Mason Jr.**, saying they needed a solution to the "nomination review" system that allows for "add ons that the Nomination review has the power to use." The emails continued, "At the moment they can basically pick their own nominees."

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Deborah Dugan Officially Terminated by Recording Academy

Another board member wrote to Dugan saying, "I couldn't agree more with their assessment of our [nomination] system. It's broken. We should admit it and fix it," according to the EEOC filing, which was a supplement to her original filing with the organization on Jan. 21.

In addition, Dugan shared an email from Grammys producer **Ken Ehrlich** where he specifically lobbies for a "particular superstar" to be nominated in order for them to be more inclined to perform at the Grammys. Mason replied to Ehrlich's email saying, "Gotcha. Thanks Ken."

Dugan says that since she publicly aired her grievances against the academy, the nonprofit organization has responded by subjecting her to “repeated, ongoing, and egregious retaliation.”

She also noted that on Monday, the academy not only terminated Dugan’s employment “without cause,” but then “immediately leaked that information to the press, along with the defamatory and retaliatory quotes.”

Her attorneys call the decision to terminate Dugan “a blatant act of retaliation.”

“Worse, it is a message to women and minorities of all walks of life that the Academy is more interested in protecting itself than remedying sexual harassment, discrimination and voting irregularities, and that anyone who dares to stand against the Academy’s unlawful conduct will be harshly punished,” states Dugan’s court filing.

Deborah Dugan Responds to Recording Academy Termination: 'I Am Not Surprised'

Before she was terminated on Monday, Dugan -- who was hired in August 2019 -- had been on paid administrative leave since Jan. 16. On Jan. 21, she filed a lengthy discrimination EEOC complaint against the academy. In that initial complaint, she not only described the academy's Grammy voting system as corrupt but also accused the organization's general counsel, **Joel Katz**, of sexual harassment.

In her new complaint, Dugan alleges that the academy conducted a “bogus investigation” into her allegations. She claims that instead of hiring an independent investigator, as was promised, it retained an attorney that was “handpicked” by the Proskauer law firm, one of the firms that Dugan alleged is “in bed” with the academy and whose partner **Chuck Ortner** is national legal counsel to the academy.

“Proskauer selected the investigator who is supposed to be investigating, in part, Prokauer,” states Dugan’s complaint. “A greater conflict of interest can hardly be imagined.”

She also contends that all the complaints made against her to justify her firing -- such as hiring consultants without board approval, pushing forward with an office renovation without approval, disclosing confidential information to the media and others -- are untrue. Dugan says she tried to institute the changes in the organization that she was hired to, but was ultimately prevented from doing so.

In the new court papers, Dugan reiterates her initial claims that the academy is “run as a boy’s club rife with sexual harassment (including an allegation of rape), gender and race discrimination (including discrimination against multiple women and minorities), self-

dealing, conflicts of interests and award nomination voting irregularities, among other misogynistic misconduct."

Dugan's legal filing states that after she made her formal complaint to human resources, she was stripped of all her responsibilities and placed on administrative leave. She says that, contrary to the academy's statements, she was not put on leave when her then-administrative assistant **Claudine Little** complained of bullying behavior, but rather when she made her "HR complaint, refused to withdraw it and declined to accept the Academy's multi-million dollar offer to settle her claims and walk away."

The Recording Academy previously told *Billboard* that on Jan. 10 -- six days before Dugan was placed on administrative leave on Jan. 16 -- she asked for a \$22 million settlement.

Two other sources told *Billboard* the Recording Academy countered with a multi-million dollar offer -- for much less than \$22 million -- which she turned down. Dugan's initial deal with the Recording Academy was for three years with an annual salary of slightly less than \$1 million, plus bonuses, according to sources.

Dugan's attorneys **Douglas H. Wigdor** and **Michael J. Willemin** of Wigdor LLP released a statement saying that Dugan has been subjected to "vicious and unrelenting retaliation" for speaking out about the academy's improprieties that necessitated the filing of these new charges.

"Ms. Dugan filed a supplemental EEOC complaint that details the vicious and unrelenting retaliation to which she has been subjected since she filed her initial EEOC complaint, in which she exposed misogyny, sexual harassment, discrimination and corruption, including voting irregularities, at the Academy," said Wigdor and Willemin's statement. "Rather than remedy this conduct, the Academy decided to sue Ms. Dugan and terminate her employment. In all of our collective years of practice, this is the most blatant act of retaliation we have ever encountered, and it represents the antithesis of all of the progress society has made on issues of discrimination and harassment in the past number of years.

"Unfortunately, as alleged in the supplemental charge, the Academy's conflicted attorneys at Proskauer Rose LLP also are apparently stuck in an era of the past and believe that it is okay to advise clients to punish women and victims of discrimination for standing up and speaking out. Indeed, as alleged in paragraph 39, Proskauer has a disturbing history of signing its name to malicious and retaliatory lawsuits against alleged victims of discrimination and harassment."

A Recording Academy spokesperson responded to Dugan's latest EEOC on Tuesday, saying, "The first we heard of supplements to her initial EEOC complaints was when media sent it to us. It is deeply disappointing and concerning that the EEOC process is being manipulated in this way. We will review these allegations along with the others and respond in due course."

