

# SoulCycle Is Facing Accusations of ‘Blatant Pregnancy Discrimination’

[the cut.com/2020/08/soulcycle-accused-of-blatant-pregnancy-discrimination.html](https://www.thecut.com/2020/08/soulcycle-accused-of-blatant-pregnancy-discrimination.html)

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A former SoulCycle executive says she was demoted after informing her employer that she was pregnant, and then fired barely a month after giving birth. While the boutique cycling studio told her that her position had to be eliminated due to the economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, she was unconvinced, saying that she had been given “various shifting, nebulous, excuses.” In a new [lawsuit](#), she accuses the company of retaliating against her because she was pregnant.

In the complaint, filed Tuesday with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in New York, Jordan Kafenbaum lays out her final months at the company — during which she claims she suffered “blatant pregnancy discrimination and retaliation.” Kafenbaum traces the mistreatment back to last September, when former chief people officer Adrienne Gemperle widely shared news of Kafenbaum’s pregnancy in an insensitive manner. While discussing a newly implemented family-leave policy, the complaint claims that Gemperle said, “Jordan Kafenbaum’s mother actually just called to thank me for changing our policy because when we did ... Jordan finally got pregnant!”

While Gemperle dismissed the incident as an innocent joke, per the complaint, Kafenbaum says she continued to experience mistreatment. Before management learned she was pregnant, Kafenbaum had been told that she would be promoted; but in February, leadership started talking to Kafenbaum about moving her into a new position with less authority after her maternity leave. Then, on April 27, 32 days after Kafenbaum gave birth, the complaint claims that the company “seized upon the horrific COVID-19 crisis as a pretextual opportunity” to eliminate Kafenbaum’s job. However, per the lawsuit, they also offered her other “inconsistent excuses,” including “department re-organization” and “performance concerns.”

The complaint also points to an incident last fall involving Melanie Whelan, SoulCycle’s former CEO, who allegedly told an employee that “paternity leave is for pussies, and claims that three other women who were pregnant or who had recently returned from maternity leave also had their positions eliminated around the same time. (Additionally, Kafenbaum claims that interim chief executive officer Sunder Reddy subjected her to “obscene and vulgar conduct,” and that she once witnessed him gesture “with his hands and mouth what is commonly known to reference to a blow job.”)

In a statement to Business Insider, a SoulCycle representative said the company “intends to vigorously defend itself,” as it “strongly disagrees with the accusations” made in Kafenbaum’s lawsuit, reiterating that Kafenbaum was laid off as restructuring due to the impact of the pandemic. (Kafenbaum is also suing Gemperle and Reddy, alongside SoulCycle. Refinery29 reached out to the former, who did not respond to its request for comment.)

But Kafenbaum disputes this narrative. “There is no lawful justification for firing a senior executive, whose seven-year work anniversary was days away and a mere 32 days after giving birth and only four weeks into her maternity leave — at any time, much less six weeks into the COVID-19 quarantine,” the complaint reads. The suit claims that SoulCycle violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended by the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1974, and Kafenbaum is seeking “all relief available, including injunctive and equitable relief, all monetary and punitive damages available.”