

Lawsuit accuses former SoulCycle CEO of making crass comment about paternity leave

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Dads aren't on board with former SoulCycle CEO's offensive comments about paternity leave.

A legal complaint filed Tuesday accuses former SoulCycle CEO Melanie Whelan of once telling a male executive that 'paternity leave is for p----ies,' among other discriminatory accusations mentioned about the company, including the alleged firing of a female employee one month into her maternity leave.

"Times are different. I don't get offended that easily, but it's out of line, especially for someone in a power — you shouldn't be saying that," Jeff Martin, 34, a dad and elementary school teacher from Fairfield, N.J., told FOX Business Wednesday.

Martin took paid paternity leave last year after his son was born, and his wife had to go back to work eight weeks later. He said doctors stressed the importance of both parents bonding with their child early on. And, financially, the couple would have had to spend up to \$1,400 per month on day care if neither of them had access to a paid parental leave workplace policy.

"We were against throwing him into day care at such a young age," Martin said, adding that he was able to take three weeks off with his son. "Being a teacher, I see the benefits of when parents are home with them. There was no question -- I was going to take it. I know it's going to benefit him in the long run."

The lawsuit was filed by a former SoulCycle employee Jordan Kafenbaum for pregnancy discrimination. In it, Kafenbaum, who oversaw close to 400 employees at the New York City-based fitness company, said she was fired 32 days after giving birth, according to the complaint. A month into her maternity leave — and amid the coronavirus pandemic — Kafenbaum was told she was being let go. She had been employed at the company for seven years.

But the lawsuit also accuses Whelan of making a vulgar remark in 2019 to Gary Gaines, the company's senior vice president of global operations and studio experience, saying that "paternity leave is for p---sies." Gaines was allegedly planning on taking paternity leave.

"News of the comment spread like fire through all levels of SoulCycle employees," the complaint says. "Such a statement is unlawful standing alone. But when said by the CEO, it speaks volumes about the culture."

Whelan did not immediately return a FOX Business request for comment. She stepped down as CEO of the spin company in November.

The U.S. is the only country out of 41 nations mentioned in a recent report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that does not guarantee paid leave for new parents. And two months is the minimum amount of paid leave required in companies those that do. What's more, just 17% of men and women civilian workers have paid leave, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics as of 2018.

Still, there seems to be a stigma surrounding men who take the time off. Two-thirds, or 66% percent, of female employees took their allotted paid maternity leave in 2016 while just 36% of male workers used theirs, according to a report by the Society of Human Resource Management as reported by MarketWatch.

The discriminatory workplace allegations against SoulCycle come on the heels of several former workers calling out the company for exploiting its employees of color, using them and their followings to speak out amid the Black Lives Matter movement, rather than bolstering its diversity and inclusion efforts at the company.