

A former Equinox employee says managers harassed her with lurid texts and that she was fired for needing to take care of her kids

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An Equinox employee alleged the luxury fitness club's mostly male leadership cultivated a “misogynistic bro culture.”

- A former Equinox employee said managers sent her explicit sexual texts and routinely harassed her.
- She said she was fired for asking to work from home part time to balance childcare.
- Equinox, a luxury fitness company, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A former Equinox employee said managers at the luxe fitness center sexually harassed her with "dick pics" and explicit text messages. When she tried to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to take care of her two young children, her pay was slashed, the employee said.

Jaime Piccolo, formerly the senior director of corporate accounts, made the allegations against Equinox in a complaint filed Monday with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a federal agency that oversees workplace-discrimination claims.

The move is a first step before her lawyers can file a class-action lawsuit against the company in federal court.

Piccolo said she was fired in November after she sought accommodations to balance her work duties with caring for her two children.

According to her complaint, Gary Browne, an Equinox senior vice president, discriminated against her by refusing to accommodate her schedule as a working mother even during earlier surges of COVID-19 in late 2020.

Piccolo said their disagreement escalated as Browne slashed her pay and commented, "Don't you ever bring your children into this. I don't ever want to hear about your children," according to her EEOC complaint. Besides being inflexible about her work-from-home requests, Browne also harassed her for her appearance when she gained weight, she said. Browne "would comment about how Ms. Piccolo did not work out in order to embarrass her," Piccolo said in the complaint.

Piccolo said the experience was emblematic of a broader "misogynistic bro culture" at Equinox, where the vast majority of top leadership are men.

"It would not be an understatement to say that Equinox's workplace culture is uniquely and ubiquitously misogynistic and anti-women," Piccolo said in her complaint. "Indeed, over and over again, Equinox's female employees – particularly mothers – are subjected to egregious discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, and, like clockwork, Equinox turns a blind eye to this unlawful conduct and retaliates against those who are brave enough to report it."

Equinox did not immediately respond to emailed requests for comment Monday.

Piccolo says she was harassed by more than half a dozen male managers

According to Piccolo, Equinox leadership cultivated an environment in which managers were not held accountable for harassing employees at work.

She said she was harassed by more than half a dozen male managers and executives during her nearly two decades at the company.

For instance, Piccolo said Jed Prisby, a former senior director of club operations, barraged her with "numerous dick pics over the years," "rubbed up against her" at work events, and sent her explicit messages describing sexual fantasies.

Prisby was later fired but only after it was discovered he was sleeping with one of his direct reports, according to the complaint. Piccolo said her claims about his sexual harassment went ignored.

Piccolo said several other regional directors including Brian DeCato, who has since resigned, also harassed her and other employees.

Piccolo's complaint is the latest in a chorus of allegations about sexual harassment and discrimination at Equinox. At least two lawsuits have been brought over DeCato's behavior, and female managers have also sued the company over allegations of gender and pregnancy discrimination.

Piccolo's complaint wasn't filed in court, but she plans to sue Equinox soon

Piccolo filed her complaint Monday with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which is often a required first step before employees can bring harassment claims in federal court.

The EEOC oversees federal workplace-discrimination laws. In most cases, employees must first file their harassment claims with the agency before bringing a lawsuit in federal court.

Filing an EEOC complaint also allows employees to pursue their claims without necessarily going public, if they'd rather protect their privacy.

But employees can often also get the agency's permission to sue through what's known as an EEOC right-to-sue letter and pursue their claims in public court.

Piccolo's lawyers have indicated to the EEOC that they plan to sue Equinox when they get a letter, detailing potential class claims that target the broader culture at the gym.