

# Ex-TikTok Executive Sues, Saying She Was Put on 'Kill List' Because She Lacked 'Docility'

[businessinsider.com/tiktok-employee-unlawfully-terminated-lawsuit-discrimination-bytedance-2024-2](https://www.businessinsider.com/tiktok-employee-unlawfully-terminated-lawsuit-discrimination-bytedance-2024-2)

indeed

Different times call for *different hiring*

See how

- An ex-TikTok managing director is suing the company and ByteDance for discrimination and retaliation.
- Katie Ellen Puris alleges she was fired because she "lacked the docility and meekness" required of women employees.
- The lawsuit alleges Puris wound up on the ByteDance chairman's employee "kill list."

Sign up to get the inside scoop on today's biggest stories in markets, tech, and business — delivered daily.  
Read preview

By clicking "Sign Up", you accept our Terms of Service and Privacy Policy. You can opt-out at any time.



An ex-managing director at TikTok has accused the company behind the popular social media app and its China-based owner of unlawfully firing her because the corporate big-wigs deemed she "lacked the docility and meekness" required of women working there.

Katie Ellen Puris said in a lawsuit filed in New York federal court Thursday that after she was hired in 2019 and promoted for her performance, she wound up on a so-called employee "kill list" orchestrated by Lidong Zhang, the chairman of TikTok's Beijing parent company, ByteDance.

Puris, who the lawsuit says joined TikTok's New York office as managing director and US head of business marketing in 2019, is suing TikTok Inc. and ByteDance for discrimination and retaliation.

TikTok and ByteDance did not immediately respond to Business Insider's requests for comment.

The lawsuit says that Puris, a former Google and Facebook employee, was "extraordinarily successful" from the start of her employment at TikTok, so much so that within two months of being hired she was promoted to lead the global business marketing team.

"However, after Ms. Puris — one of the most senior female executives in the United States — was invited to attend and participate in bi-weekly meetings" with Zhang "she was subjected to disparate treatment and ultimately unlawfully terminated."

"Zhang and other corporate executives determined that Ms. Puris lacked the docility and meekness specifically required of female employees," the complaint says.

Zhang "had a stereotypical view of the way women should behave" and the way Puris celebrated her team's accomplishments "did not fit that stereotypical gender mold," the complaint says.



Sponsored Content by World Wide Technology

The rapid advancement of AI is digitally transforming businesses. Here's what that means for business leaders.

The lawsuit alleges that as Puris neared closer to 50 years old, the "disparate treatment" she endured only worsened and company executives "made it clear that they preferred young, less experienced employees who they believed to be more innovative and pliable."

Outside of her firing, Puris also reported mistreatment while working at the company.

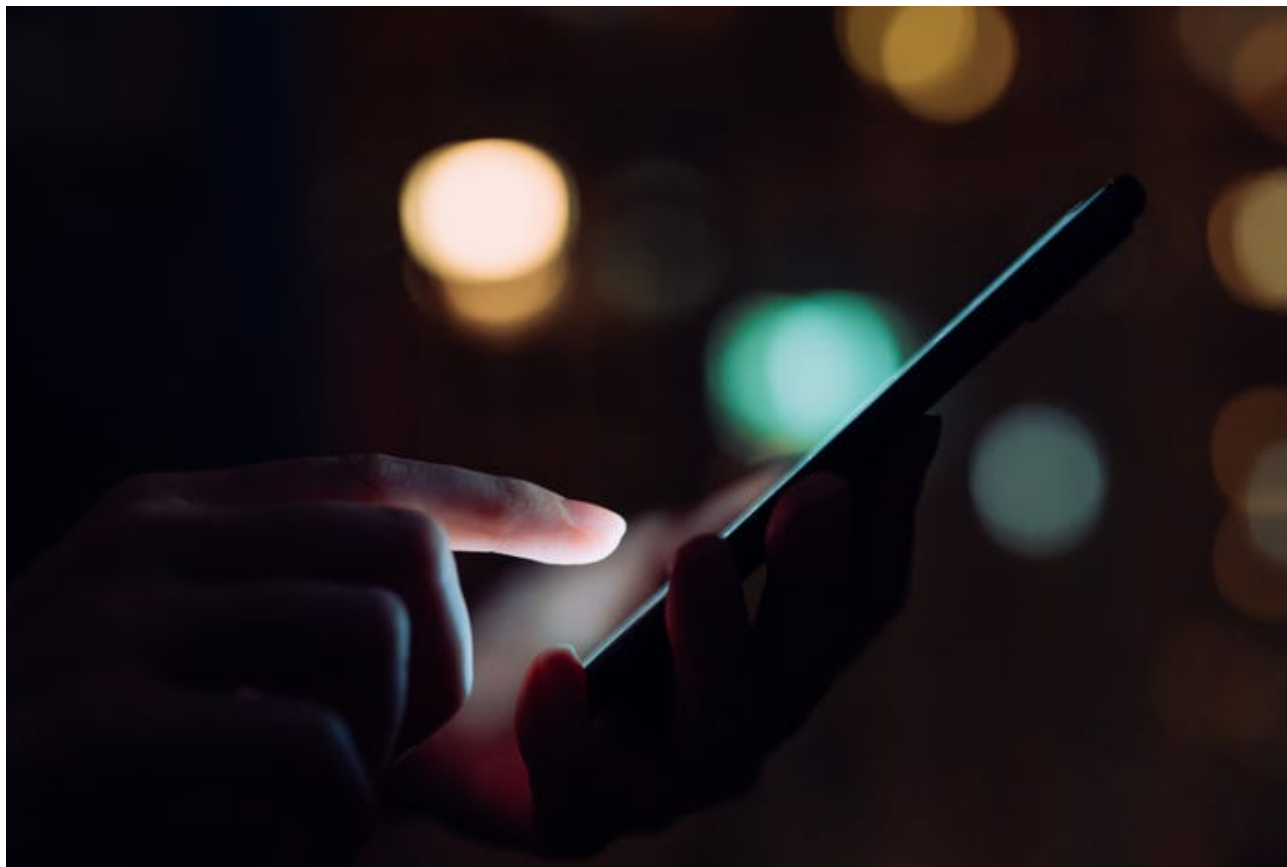
She says in the complaint that she reported to the company that she was sexually harassed at the June 2022 Cannes Lions industry event in France by an employee at a marketing company and that TikTok "failed to respond appropriately."

Puris also noted in the suit that she had reported "discriminatory treatment" she faced to her managers and HR, but that the company, "taking its directives from the office in China, failed to take any corrective action."



Sponsored Content by Singapore EDB

Your next plane ride could be powered by used cooking oil. Here's how a refinery in Singapore is already helping to make it happen.



d3sign/getty images

## **The lawsuit says it 'became very evident' that Puris was on Zhang's alleged 'kill list'**

---

ByteDance executives, including Zhang, started having more control of TikTok's day-to-day operations in late 2020 and early 2021 and it "became clear immediately" that Zhang was "displeased" with the way Puris led presentations, the lawsuit says.

Puris "celebrated her team's successes and achievements," and Zhang felt that was "inappropriate" because "he believes that women should always remain humble and express modesty," the complaint says.

"By the second quarter of 2021, it became very evident that Ms. Puris was on Lidong Zhang's 'kill list,'" the lawsuit says. "Part of Lidong Zhang's 'kill list' approach was to build a case against any employee he placed on the list and instruct other employees to do the same."

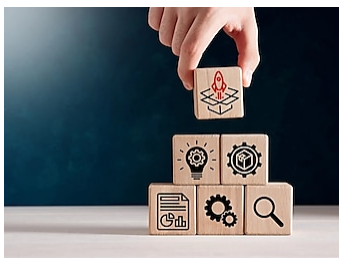
Puris says that as a result, TikTok started "minimizing" her role at the company and she was left out of important decisions that would impact her team.

"Ms. Puris' health began to suffer under the stress and pressure placed on her after she became part of Lidong Zhang's 'kill list,'" the lawsuit says, adding that she suffered health issues and needed numerous surgical procedures due to ulcers, migraines, and irritable bowel syndrome.

The lawsuit says Puris was fired in September 2022 for "performance reasons" days after she emailed the head of global human resources to again "express concerns" about "the treatment of women at TikTok, age discrimination, the sexual harassment at Cannes Lion and the overall work environment."

"As a woman who started her career in 1995, I was taught to be quiet if I wanted to be successful. Gender discrimination and sexual harassment were commonplace, but speaking out was career suicide," Puris told BI in a statement. "Wisdom has taught me that I no longer need to be silenced or afraid to fight for change."

Her attorneys, Marjorie Mesidor and Monica Hincken, added in a statement that "by all metrics," Puris was "enormously successful at her job and created a successful team."



Sponsored Content by Twilio

6 startups reimagining the future of customer engagement with AI

"Yet, when she began complaining about the discriminatory treatment she received and the Company's failure to properly handle her sexual harassment complaint, she swiftly suffered retaliatory consequences that resulted in her unlawful termination," the lawyers said. "TikTok's actions against Ms. Puris are illegal and we look forward to vindicating her rights."

Puris' suit is seeking unspecified damages and a trial by jury.