TikTok Sued by Former Female Executive Over Discrimination

bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-08/tiktok-sued-by-former-female-executive-over-discrimination

Equality

TikTok Executive Says She Was Fired for Lacking ‘Docility’

- Former TikTok marketing executive files discrimination suit
- Lawsuit says employee was fired after harassment complaint

In this Article

TIKTOK INC
Private Company

BYTEDANCE LTD
Private Company

LEARN MORE

By Chris Dolmetsch

February 8, 2024 at 2:34 PM EST

Updated on

February 8, 2024 at 3:46 PM EST

TikTok Inc.'s former head of global marketing said she was fired because ByteDance Ltd. Chairman Zhang Lidong and other executives determined she "lacked the docility and meekness" they believed was required of female employees.

The claim was part of a lawsuit filed Thursday in federal court in Manhattan against the social media service and its parent company, ByteDance, on behalf of Katie Ellen Puris, who joined TikTok as managing director and US head of business marketing in December 2019.

Puris said she was "extraordinarily successful" at the company and was eventually promoted to lead the global business marketing team within two months. But she claims that after she began participating in biweekly meetings with Zhang, she was "subjected to disparate treatment" and ultimately fired.

"The disparate treatment Ms. Puris experienced only increased as she neared 50 years old and company executives made it clear that they preferred young, less experienced employees who they believed to be more innovative and pliable," lawyers for the former executive said in their complaint.

The suit comes just months after ByteDance was accused of racism and retaliation by Black former employees who allege the company terminated them because they spoke up against discrimination in a complaint with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

TikTok didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment on the suit. The complaint includes sex and age discrimination claims.

Puris, a former Google and Facebook executive, says she was fired because she lacked the "docility and meekness" required of female employees and didn't fit the "stereotypical view of the way women should behave" that Zhang held.

She says that when she reported that she was sexually harassed at an industry event in France in June 2022 by the managing director of an advertising agency, the company forced her to choose between safety and work opportunities. TikTok then gutted her team, gave her a "devastatingly low-performance review," denied her annual bonus, moved her out of her position and ultimately fired her.

The case is Puris v TikTok Inc., 24-cv-944, US District Court, Southern District of New York.

(Adds background, call to company starting in fourth paragraph)

Follow all new stories by **Chris Dolmetsch**

Up Next

Snoop Dogg Sues Walmart Over ‘Diabolical’ Acts in Cereal Deal

Equality

Snoop Dogg Sues Walmart Over ‘Diabolical’ Acts in Cereal Deal

- Rapper claims his Fruity Hoopz and others aren’t on shelves
- Civil rights lawyer Crump among attorneys for Snoop, Master P

In this Article

WALMART INC
169.37USD

▼
–0.01%

By Ethan M Steinberg and Devin Leonard
February 8, 2024 at 12:59 PM EST

Rap stars Snoop Dogg and Master P sued Walmart Inc. and Post Foods LLC, claiming the consumer giants conspired to crush their Snoop Cereal, intended as a model for other minority-owned brands.

The musicians’ company Broadus Foods LLC accuses the world’s largest retailer of hiding boxes of its cereal — Fruity Hoopz With Marshmallows, Frosted Drizzlers and Cinnamon Toasteez — in its stockrooms to keep them off the shelves at Post’s instruction.

In a suit filed this week in Minnesota state court by a legal team including the civil rights attorney Ben Crump, Broadus Foods says the rap artists had “a vision to create a family-owned company that would add diversity to the food industry while inspiring and creating opportunities for minority-owned food products and brands.” It claims Walmart and Post’s “diabolical” plot sank their profits and hopes just as their company was starting to take off.

“If Post and Walmart are able to do this to popular businessmen such as Snoop Dogg and Master P, then they definitely will do it to the mom-and-pop and minority-owned companies who do not have the ability to defend themselves,” Broadus warned in its complaint, which is studded with photos its says demonstrate the alleged collusion.

Troubled Team-Ups

The suit follows others filed in recent years by prominent hip-hop artists including Sean “Diddy” Combs and Jay-Z against big consumer products companies over soured joint ventures, and highlights the pros and cons of such high-profile team-ups. In January Diddy dropped claims against Diageo North America Inc. that the spirits company had exhibited racism in neglecting his liquor brands. Last February Jay-Z and a Bacardi Ltd. affiliate resolved a battle over a cognac joint venture after months of arbitration and litigation.

Walmart said in a statement that it values its relationships with suppliers and that many factors affect a product’s sales, including price and consumer demand. Post said it made “substantial investments” in Broadus and was excited to partner with it.

“We were equally disappointed that consumer demand did not meet expectations,” Post said in a statement.

Lawyers for the two companies couldn’t immediately be reached for comment on the lawsuit.

Alleged Plot

According to the complaint, which seeks a jury trial and monetary damages, Post wanted to buy Snoop Cereal outright. Broadus refused, saying that would be contrary to its vision, and Post agreed instead to handle the production and distribution of Snoop Cereal in return for half the profits. The startup is named for Calvin Broadus Jr., Snoop Dogg’s real name.

Snoop CerealSource: Broadus Foods

Broadus says it expected its products to be placed on the same shelves as those of Post, a valued supplier among Walmart’s cereal offerings. But after a few months, it claims, Walmart customers couldn’t find Snoop Cereal, only to discover that it was being stored in the stockroom.

“Essentially, because Snoop Dogg and Master refused to sell Snoop Cereal in totality, Post entered a false arrangement where they could choke Broadus Foods out of the market, thereby preventing Snoop Cereal from being sold or produced by any competitor,” Broadus alleges.

Crump has represented the families of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery.

The case is Broadus Foods LLC v. Post, 19HA-CV-24-526, Minnesota District Court, 1st Judicial District (Dakota County).

Get Alerts for:

Up Next

Snoop Dogg Sues Walmart Over ‘Diabolical’ Acts in Cereal Deal

Equality

Industry Slams Provisional EU Deal on Gig Workers’ Labor Rights

- Ride-hailing industry calls on EU countries to reject proposal
- Previous plan in December failed to attract enough support

A Just Eat Takeaway.com food delivery worker carries a customer order in Berlin, Germany.
Photographer: Liesa Johannssen-Koppitz/Bloomberg

By Max Ramsay and Aggi Cantrill
February 8, 2024 at 10:33 AM EST

The ride-hailing industry criticized a provisional deal struck on Thursday by European Union negotiators that aims to strengthen gig workers’ employment rights.

The proposed regulation would ensure people working for platforms like Uber Technologies Inc., Deliveroo Plc and others are able to more easily challenge their employment status, and puts the onus on platforms to prove a worker is not an employee, according to a European Parliament statement.

The Platform Work Directive has faced numerous setbacks since it was first proposed by the European Commission, the bloc’s executive arm, in 2021. Time is running short to reach a final agreement before EU elections in June.

MoveEU, the association of ride-hailing platforms that represents companies including Bolt and Uber within Europe, sharply criticized the proposed regulation and called on EU countries to reject it.

The group’s Chair Aurélien Pozzana said it was the result of a “rushed process to agree to any directive at any price, despite lack of support from many member states.”

“Given the vague nature of the text and the lack of thorough impact assessment, it would lead to uncertainty for national labor systems and hundreds of thousands of professional drivers while greatly hindering operations for ride-hailing platforms if it was to be adopted,” he added.

A Just Eat Takeaway.com NV spokesperson said Thursday’s deal was “positive” but the company was waiting for further details on the text of the proposed regulation. An Uber representative said the company wouldn’t comment until it had seen the full text.

Deliveroo declined to comment. Wolt did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A provisional deal was previously reached in December, but then failed to get the necessary support from EU countries. It would have classified platform workers as employees if they met certain criteria covering working conditions and salaries.

Thursday’s agreement, which leaves member states to set the employment criteria, may meet the same fate. It will be presented to member states on Friday and will likely face a vote next week, according to an EU official.

The regulation also prohibits platforms from firing workers based on algorithms or automated decision-making systems.

When a version of the rules was first proposed, the industry would have been on the hook for an additional €4.5 billion ($5 billion) per year based on the number of eligible workers at the time, according to the commission’s estimates.

Thursday’s provisional agreement still needs to be formally adopted by both the parliament and the Council of the EU, comprising EU member states, before it enters into force.