

# Grammys Leader Deborah Dugan Removed 10 Days Before Ceremony

The chief executive was placed on administrative leave following an “allegation of misconduct,” three weeks after sending a memo about voting irregularities and financial mismanagement.



Deborah Dugan, who joined the Recording Academy in August, was placed on administrative leave just 10 days before the Grammys ceremony. Bethany Mollenkof for The New York Times



By Ben Sisario

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In the latest tumultuous twist for the Recording Academy, the embattled organization behind the Grammy Awards, the institution’s brand-new chief executive, Deborah Dugan, was removed from her position on Thursday, just 10 days before this year’s ceremony.

In a statement late Thursday, the academy said that Ms. Dugan, who [joined the organization in August](#), had been placed on administrative leave “in light of concerns raised to the Recording Academy board of trustees, including a formal allegation of misconduct by a senior female member of the Recording Academy team.” The board, it said, had retained two independent investigators to look into the matter.

On Thursday, the academy declined to elaborate on the reasons for Ms. Dugan’s dismissal.

But according to a person with direct knowledge of the events, Ms. Dugan had been removed after a complaint was filed by the assistant to her predecessor, Neil Portnow, who had also worked temporarily for Ms. Dugan. The assistant accused Ms. Dugan of a bullying management style, the person said, which contributed to the assistant taking a leave of absence.

Ms. Dugan’s dismissal also came less than three weeks after she sent a memo to the academy’s head of human resources that detailed her concerns about the governance and practices of the organization, which she said led her to believe that “something was seriously amiss at the Academy.”

Her concerns detailed in the memo included voting irregularities, financial mismanagement, “exorbitant and unnecessary” legal bills, and conflicts of interest involving members of the academy’s board, executive committee and outside lawyers.

“What has been reported is not nearly the story that needs to be told,” said Ms. Dugan’s lawyer, Bryan Freedman. “When our ability to speak is not restrained by a 28-page contract and legal threats, we will expose what happens when you ‘step up’ at the Recording Academy, a public nonprofit.”

A representative of the academy did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Friday morning.

Ms. Dugan had succeeded Mr. Portnow, who left last year. In 2018, the academy came under fire over a remark by Mr. Portnow after that year’s ceremony, in which he said that women in the music industry should “[step up](#)” to advance their careers and be recognized by the Grammys. That comment, which he said had been taken out of context, led a number of prominent women in the music industry to call for his dismissal.

The news of Ms. Dugan’s removal was first reported by [The Los Angeles Times](#).

In her five months on the job Ms. Dugan — a lawyer and former music executive who had last been the chief of Red, the nonprofit group co-founded by Bono of U2 — approved a series of changes to the organization’s structure at the recommendation of a task force put in place after the 2018 Grammys to address issues of diversity and gender imbalance.

Ms. Dugan also led the academy to settle a lawsuit filed by a longtime former employee of MusiCares, a Grammy-affiliated charity, in which the employee said she had been wrongfully terminated and that a toxic “boys club” controlled the institution.