

Pop Culture

Recording Academy chief Deborah Dugan placed on leave just days before Grammys ceremony



Deborah Dugan, president and CEO of the Recording Academy, has been removed from her position over unspecified allegations of misconduct. She is pictured Nov. 20, 2019 at a news conference for the Grammy Award nominations. (Charles Sykes/Invision/AP)

By [Sonia Rao](#) and [Bethonie Butler](#)

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The Recording Academy, the organization that presents the annual Grammy Awards, has suspended its chief executive, Deborah Dugan just days ahead of the Jan. 26 ceremony, the [Associated Press reported](#).

Dugan is less than six months into her tenure at the academy, which said in a statement to multiple outlets Thursday that she had been placed on administrative leave following a “formal allegation of misconduct by a senior female member of the Recording Academy.” The statement also cited other “concerns raised” to its board of trustees, but did not provide details on those concerns or Dugan’s alleged misconduct.

Dugan’s suspension arrives nearly a year after another bumpy period for the Grammys, when pop singer Ariana Grande [announced she had pulled out of performing](#) at the 2019 ceremony over a creative disagreement with its producers: “my creativity & self expression was stifled by you,” she tweeted, directing her message at Ken Ehrlich, who has produced the show for nearly four decades but will retire after this year’s ceremony (at which Grande is slated to perform). Rappers Childish Gambino, Drake and Kendrick Lamar also turned down Ehrlich’s offers to perform, drawing attention to the Grammys’ troubled relationship with hip-hop artists.

The previous year’s ceremony highlighted the Grammys’ similarly long-standing struggle with gender inequality — the sole woman to receive an award during the 2018 telecast was best new artist Alessia Cara, and Lorde, the only woman to be nominated for album of the year, wasn’t invited to perform her music. Then-president Neil Portnow, Dugan’s predecessor, said when asked about the lack of female winners that women needed to “step up.” His words, which he later claimed were taken out of context, [sparked outrage](#) throughout the industry, and the academy hired attorney Tina Tchen, who now serves as the CEO of Time’s Up, to lead a new task force on inclusion and diversity.

[According to the New York Times](#), Dugan has hired Bryan J. Freedman, the entertainment lawyer who represented Megyn Kelly in her [long and chaotic contract dispute](#) with NBC following Kelly’s widely criticized comments about the use of blackface in Halloween costumes. Freedman [alluded to the academy’s turmoil](#) in a statement to the Times and others. “What has been reported is not nearly the story that needs to be told,” he told the paper. “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.” Freedman has not yet responded to an inquiry from The Washington Post.

Dugan, who previously worked as the CEO of RED, the HIV/AIDS advocacy effort co-founded by U2’s Bono, [told Variety](#) in an interview last week that change was “afoot” at the organization.

“There’s a lot more communication, and there have been huge efforts to make sure we’re more inclusive and more diverse,” she is quoted as saying. “I want us to be of the industry, but also ahead of it — pioneering, and not catching up.”