Google workers fired amid organization efforts file retaliation complaint



Enlarge / Google’s main headquarters.

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Four former employees who say Google fired them in retaliation for their efforts to organize co-workers are planning legal action against the company. The workers allege the tech giant violated US labor law.

The employees—Laurence Berland, Paul Duke, Rebecca Rivers, and Sophie Waldman—jointly signed onto an open letter posted today outlining their grievances with their former employer.

"We participated in legally protected labor organizing, fighting to improve workplace conditions for all Google workers," they write. They also worked to "hold Google accountable for the impact on our workplace of its business decisions, policies, and practices on a range of topics." Those topics include protesting Google's work with US immigration enforcement agencies and the Department of Defense and protesting Google's work with the Chinese government, as well as a massive walkout of 20,000 Google employees last year to protest the company's handling of sexual harassment allegations against senior executives.

The employees continued:

> *It's clear that [Google's] draconian, pernicious, and unlawful conduct isn't about us. It's about trying to stop all workplace organizing. Google wants to send a message to everyone: if you dare to engage in protected labor organizing, you will be punished. They count on the fear, the sadness, and the anger that we are all feeling to stop us all from exercising our rights, and to chill all attempts to hold one of the most powerful organizations in history accountable for its actions.*

Their first step will be to file charges of Unfair Labor Practice with the National Labor Relations Board. Federal labor law explicitly prohibits employers from retaliating against employees for organizing inside the workplace, either to form a union or to band together to "improve terms and conditions of employment" without a union, and they claim Google did just that.

Berland, Duke, Rivers, and Waldman are not the first high-visibility Google employees to claim their employer acted in a

retaliatory fashion. Two employees who helped organize the 2018 mass walkout, Meredith Whittaker and Claire Stapleton, said earlier this year that they were facing retaliation from their employer, writing that they were facing demotions or reassignments that would have significant impacts on their careers. Stapleton left the company in June, followed by Whittaker’s departure in July.

Google denies that the employees were fired in retaliation for any organizing activity. “We dismissed four individuals who were engaged in intentional and often repeated violations of our longstanding data security policies, including systematically accessing and disseminating other employees’ materials and work,” a company spokesperson said in a statement. “No one has been dismissed for raising concerns or debating the company’s activities.”

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