


# Ex-Model Who Accused Epstein Pal Leon Black of Sex Abuse Sues Him for Defamation

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A former model who accused Leon Black of sexual abuse earlier this year is now suing the embattled billionaire for defamation, alleging he lied to the media about their relationship and falsely accused her of extortion.

In a 29-page lawsuit filed Tuesday in New York State Supreme Court, Guzel Ganieva, 38, accused Black, the former CEO of Apollo Global Management, of defamation, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and gender-motivated violence throughout their six-year relationship, which ended in 2015 when she was allegedly forced to sign an NDA and take hush money.

“The only repeated threats for many years came from Black to Ms. Ganieva that if she did not sign the NDA, take his hush money and retreat into silence forever, she would feel the brunt of his true wrath,” the lawsuit states. “Threatening that a criminal charge will be brought against Ms. Ganieva first will not save Black from the truth about what he has done. The truth will reveal a violent, sadistic side to Black that he has shielded from public view for decades.”

In March, Ganieva took to Twitter, alleging she was “sexually harassed and abused” by Black for years. Five days later, Black made a surprise early exit from his private equity firm in March—citing his wife’s and his own “health issues.”

The Apollo cofounder, whose career was already in turmoil after news of his financial entanglement with pedophile Jeffrey Epstein, then told multiple outlets weeks later that he “foolishly had a consensual affair” with Ganieva several years ago and denied any wrongdoing.

Although I am a private person, in light of the recent media coverage, I think I have an obligation to make a statement regarding Apollo Global Management’s CEO and Chairman, Leon Black. I was sexually harassed and abused by him for years.

— Guzel Ganieva (@GuzelGanieva3) March 17, 2021

“The truth is that I have been extorted by Ms. Ganieva for many years and I made substantial monetary payments to her, based on her threats to go public concerning our relationship, in an attempt to spare my family from public embarrassment,” Black said in the April 8 statement, which claimed he had asked authorities to investigate Ganieva weeks prior.

In a statement to The Daily Beast, a spokesperson for Black denied Ganieva's latest allegations, insisting the "frivolous lawsuit is riddled with lies and is nothing more than a wholesale fiction."

"The truth is that Leon Black had a wholly consensual relationship with Ms. Ganieva for six years, and then, as we have previously advised the criminal authorities, Mr. Black was subsequently extorted by Ms. Ganieva for many years and made substantial monetary payments to her based on her threats to go public about their relationship and cause him reputational risk and harm to his family," the spokesperson said, adding that Black "looks forward to disproving" the allegations in court.

Black, who co-founded the \$455 billion private equity firm in 1990, has come under scrutiny for his long friendship and financial ties to Epstein. An internal review revealed Black paid the sex offender more than \$150 million from 2012 to 2017 for his financial services—including one transfer after Epstein was convicted of soliciting prostitution from a teenage girl in 2008.

The report, however, found no evidence that Black knew or participated in Epstein's sexual abuse of girls and young women. Black has denied any misconduct in Epstein's crimes and has previously acknowledged giving the financier a second chance after his conviction was a "terrible mistake."

According to Ganieva's lawsuit, the former model was first introduced to the billionaire at a 2008 International Women's Day event in New York City. Soon after, she agreed to have dinner with him, hoping he could help her "move beyond modeling," she says.

Ganieva explicitly told Black she wasn't interested in having a sexual relationship with him, according to the lawsuit. But later that year, Black allegedly forced himself on her in a "studio apartment with a mattress on the floor and no other furniture." Soon after the alleged assault, which she never reported to the police, Black began a "cycle of intimidation, abuse, and humiliation" over the next several years, the lawsuit states.

After each sexual assault, Ganieva would tell the billionaire to leave her alone, and he would show "remorseful and conciliatory behavior," promising to pay for her education and homes, according to the lawsuit.

In 2011, Ganieva went back to school to finish her undergraduate degree. Around the same time, the lawsuit states that Black forced Ganieva to take a \$480,000 loan from him despite her protests "that she would never be able to pay it back." Two years later, Black made her sign another \$480,000 loan, the lawsuit alleges.

"Black knew the magnitude of the harm that he had inflicted on Ms. Ganieva over the years. This money, at least in his twisted mind, was a way of excusing himself," the lawsuit states.

After Ganieva completed her math degree, Black insisted on helping her land a job, setting up interviews for her at financial firms in NYC, London, and Moscow, the lawsuit states. But Ganieva never received a job offer, and the lawsuit alleges his help was all part of his “sick plan to make her feel grateful to him.”

Black’s abuse continued, including one instance where he raped her inside her Upper East Side apartment on July 6, 2014, she alleges. After the alleged assault, Ganieva says she left New York with her son to “physically distance herself from Black,” but he kept calling. In 2015, she returned to New York City, at which point he tried to force her to take another loan from him or “he would make sure she ended up ‘in prison’ or he would ‘destroy her life,’” the lawsuit states.

On Oct. 18, 2015, Black allegedly made her sign an NDA during a meeting at the Four Seasons Hotel. Black told Ganieva he “agreed” to forgive her loans if she signed the NDA, according to the lawsuit.

“[I will be paying you] as long as you keep your mouth shut,” Black told Ganieva, according to the lawsuit. After the meeting, Ganieva allegedly received regular payments from an “E Truth” account until April 2021.

Over the years, Ganieva tried to obtain a copy of the contract, but Black refused to respond to her messages, the lawsuit says.

“Leon. You sexually harassed me, sex-trafficked me, raped me, and eventually blacklisted me. I don’t know for how much longer it will take me, on my own, to process the pain [you] caused to me and my family. The last thing you can do is to give me the document that I was forced to sign under duress and wasn’t able to read before signing,” Ganieva wrote in one Oct. 16, 2019, text message to Black, according to screenshots in the lawsuit. “Unfortunately I am still tied to you...”

In March 2021, Ganieva went public with her claims on Twitter.

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“I was bullied, manipulated, threatened, and coerced. Similarly, under duress, I was forced to sign an NDA in 2015. I am breaking my silence now because I do not want this type of predatory behavior to continue happening to other women,” she wrote in the March 17 tweets.

Her lawsuit alleges that the day after Ganieva posted on Twitter, Black texted her “to call him immediately.” Ganieva refused, at which point Black “resorted to the age-old playbook used by wealthy and powerful men—he made a preemptive claim of extortion,” she says.

“This case is the epitome of why #MeToo exists,” Jeanne M. Christensen, one of Ganieva’s lawyers, said in a statement to The Daily Beast. “In textbook fashion, men with wealth, power, and an army of elite lawyers continue to escape accountability for their heinous acts by twisting the legal system to penalize their victims for speaking up.”