


Lawsuit Accuses Former Apollo Global Management CEO Leon Black of Defamation, Sexual Violence

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By Jane Wester

A woman who has accused former Apollo Global Management CEO Leon Black of sexual harassment and assault filed a lawsuit against him Monday in New York County Supreme Court, alleging that he behaved violently and coerced her to sign a nondisclosure agreement.

Former model Guzel Ganieva's attorneys, Jeanne Christensen and Lindsay Goldbrum of the plaintiffs litigation firm Wigdor, argued that their client spent years enduring "a cycle of intimidation, abuse and humiliation by Black that on numerous occasions included forced sexual conduct against her will."

Black has denied the allegations.

"Many of these instances were perpetrated by Black in order for him to indulge in sadistic sexual acts that were physically painful to Ms. Ganieva and to which she never consented. In addition to causing intentional physical pain, Black engaged in these acts because he derived pleasure from humiliating and debasing Ms. Ganieva," her attorneys wrote.

Ganieva made her allegations public in a Twitter thread in March, days before Black abruptly stepped down as chairman and CEO of the private equity firm he co-founded and led for decades.

Black said in January that he would step down as CEO later in the year but continue to serve as chairman after [a review by Dechert](#) found that he had paid \$158 million to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein between 2012 and 2017.

The review found that Black saw Epstein as a friend but added that he was unaware of any criminal activity by the disgraced financier, aside from basic information from reporting about his 2008 guilty plea related to underage prostitution. When more information about Epstein's wrongdoing became public in 2018, Black said he was repulsed and regretted ever having worked with him, the review found.

A spokesperson for Black on Monday denied the allegations and described the lawsuit as frivolous.

"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 statement said. “Mr. Black emphatically denies each and every spurious allegation put forth in this lawsuit and looks forward to disproving them in court.”

Black released a similar statement to Bloomberg in April. In Monday’s filing, Christensen and Goldbrum argued that “everything” in the Bloomberg statement was false.

“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,” they wrote.

In a statement, Christensen stressed the point that Black’s behavior is part of a pattern of behavior for powerful men.

“This case is the epitome of why #MeToo exists,” she said. “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. Sadly, until prosecutors consistently go after sexual predators that wrongly accuse sexual assault victims of extortion, it is clear that #MeToo has many miles to go.”

A spokesperson for Black did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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