

Inside the sex-trafficking investigation into Sean 'Diddy' Combs

[latimes.com/california/story/2024-03-26/sean-diddy-combs-faces-sweeping-sex-trafficking-inquiry-what-the-feds-have-need-to-prove](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-03-26/sean-diddy-combs-faces-sweeping-sex-trafficking-inquiry-what-the-feds-have-need-to-prove)



Authorities walk on a street near a property belonging to Sean “Diddy” Combs on Monday in Los Angeles after federal law enforcement executed a raid as part of an ongoing sex-trafficking investigation.

(Eric Thayer / Associated Press)

By [Richard Winton](#) Staff Writer

Over the last few months, a legendary name in the music world has faced a series of shocking allegations of sexual abuse.

In civil lawsuits, four women have accused Sean “Diddy” Combs of rape, assault and other abuses, dating back three decades. One of the allegations involved a minor. The claims sent shock waves through the music industry and put Combs’ entertainment empire in jeopardy.

Now, the hip-hop mogul's legal troubles have worsened considerably.

Law enforcement sources told The Times that Combs is the subject of a sweeping inquiry into sex-trafficking allegations that resulted in a federal raid Monday at his estates in Los Angeles and Miami.



California

Sean 'Diddy' Combs' L.A., Miami homes raided in sex-trafficking inquiry, sources say.

March 26, 2024

Authorities have declined to comment on the case, and Combs has not been charged with any crime. But the scene of dozens of Department of Homeland Security agents — guns drawn — searching Combs' properties underscored the seriousness of the investigation.

At the same time as the raids, police in Miami arrested Brendan Paul, a man described in a recent lawsuit against Combs as a confidant and drug "mule." Miami-Dade police took Paul, 25, into custody on suspicion of possession of cocaine and a controlled substance-laced candy, records show.

Paul was arrested at Miami Opa-Locka Executive Airport, where TMZ posted video showing Combs walking around Monday afternoon. An affidavit reviewed by the Miami Herald alleged that police working with Homeland Security found drugs in Paul's bag. There is nothing in Miami court records connecting Combs to Paul, who was later released on \$2,500 bail.

The arrest, however, is the latest in a string of legal woes tied to Combs.

Sources with knowledge of the sex-trafficking investigation into Combs, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, said federal authorities have interviewed at least three women, but it's unclear whether any are among those who have filed suit.



Dec. 13, 2023

Legal experts say it could take time to build a criminal case against Combs but note that the civil suits could offer investigators a road map.

Dmitry Gorin, a former L.A. County sex-crimes prosecutor who is now in private practice, said the allegations in the lawsuits would likely have been enough for a judge to grant search warrants for Combs' homes.

Investigators probably would seek authorization to “search for videos or photographs on any devices connected to the target ... anywhere where digital images can be found in connection to sexual conduct that would have been recorded,” Gorin said.

Shawn Holley, an attorney for Combs, did not respond to requests for comment Tuesday.

Combs has previously denied any wrongdoing.



Sean Combs arrives at a pre-Grammy party Jan. 25, 2020, in Beverly Hills.

(Mark Von Holden / Invision / Associated Press)

Gorin and other legal experts said investigators could be focused, in part, on the sexual assault allegations involving a minor. If a minor is moved across state lines for the purpose of sex, “that is enough for at least an argument ... of sex trafficking because somebody

underage cannot consent,” Gorin said.

“Sex trafficking for adults usually involves some sort of coercion or other restraints,” he said, and can be tougher to prove. Prosecutors would need to show you “encouraged somebody to engage in sexual activity for money or some other inducement.”

Coercion, he added, is not limited to threats of violence. It could involve being held against one’s will or someone simply saying, “I don’t want to participate in group sex, and now I’m being forced to.”

Homeland Security investigates most sex-trafficking operations for the federal government. Legal experts say one possibility why the agency could be involved in this case is because the women involved in the allegations against Combs could be from other countries.



Music

Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs sexual harassment suit includes notable music industry names

Feb. 28, 2024

Meghan Blanco, a defense attorney who has handled sexual trafficking cases, said they can be “incredibly difficult cases to prove.”

“They have [in the Combs case] convinced one or more federal magistrates they had enough probable cause for one or more search warrants,” Blanco said. “Given the scope of the investigation, it seems they are further along than most investigations.”

Combs’ legal troubles have been building for months.

His former girlfriend, Cassandra Ventura, the singer known as Cassie, accused him of rape and repeated physical assaults and said he forced her to have sex with male prostitutes in front of him. Joi Dickerson-Neal accused Combs in a suit of drugging and raping her in 1991, recording the attack and then distributing the footage without her consent.

Liza Gardner filed a third suit in which she claimed Combs and R&B singer Aaron Hall sexually assaulted her. Hall could not be reached for comment.

Another lawsuit alleges that Combs and former Bad Boy label president Harve Pierre gang-raped and sex-trafficked a 17-year-old girl. Pierre said in a statement that the allegations were “disgusting,” “false” and a “desperate attempt for financial gain.”

After the filing of the fourth suit, Combs wrote on Instagram: “Enough is enough. For the last couple of weeks, I have sat silently and watched people try to assassinate my character, destroy my reputation and my legacy. Sickening allegations have been made against me by individuals looking for a quick payday. Let me be absolutely clear: I did not do any of the awful things being alleged. I will fight for my name, my family and for the truth.”

Last month, producer Rodney “Lil Rod” Jones filed a federal lawsuit against Combs accusing him of sexually harassing and threatening him for more than a year. The suit includes mention of Paul in connection with “ the affairs ... involving dealing in controlled substances.”



Sean “Diddy” Combs accepts the global icon award during the MTV Video Music Awards in September 2023.

(Charles Sykes / Invision / Associated Press)

Blanco said prosecutors “are going to look carefully for corroboration — the numbers of people accusing the person of similar acts.” Beyond that, they will be looking for videos, recordings and cellphone records that place people in the same locations or text messages or other discussions at the time of the alleged acts.

She said prosecutors are trying to build a record of incidents that happened some time ago.

Douglas Wigdor, a lawyer for Ventura and another, unnamed plaintiff, said in response to reports of the search warrant issued against Combs: “We will always support law enforcement when it seeks to prosecute those that have violated the law. Hopefully, this is the beginning of a process that will hold Mr. Combs responsible for his depraved conduct.”

Wigdor on Tuesday called his clients “courageous and credible witnesses.”

“To the extent there is a prosecution and they want our clients to testify truthfully,” he said, “I think they will and that will be damning evidence.”

The searches Monday in L.A. and Miami sparked worldwide attention.



Music

Diddy’s ‘Love’ producer Lil Rod accuses him and associates of sexual assault, illicit behavior

Feb. 27, 2024

His 17,000-square-foot Holmby Hills mansion, where Combs debuted his last album a year ago, was flooded with Homeland Security agents who gathered evidence on behalf of an investigation being run by the Southern District of New York, according to law enforcement officials familiar with the inquiry.

Two of Combs’ sons were briefly detained at the Holmby Hills property as agents searched the mansion in footage captured by FOX11 Los Angeles.

Both Blanco and Gorin said prosecutors will have to examine the accusers’ motives for coming forward and whether they are motivated by financial gain. They are sure to look for inconsistencies in any allegations, they said.

Any defense, Blanco added, will question why the accusers are only now coming forward and whether they have an incentive beyond justice.

“It comes down to credibility,” she said.

Times staff writers Stacy Perman and Nardine Saad contributed to this report.

More to Read

CaliforniaEntertainment & ArtsMusicFast Break
Newsletter

Start your day right

Sign up for Essential California for news, features and recommendations from the L.A. Times and beyond in your inbox six days a week.

You may occasionally receive promotional content from the Los Angeles Times.



Richard Winton

Richard Winton is an investigative crime writer for the Los Angeles Times and part of the team that won the Pulitzer Prize for public service in 2011. Known as [@lacrimis](#) on Twitter, during almost 30 years at The Times he also has been part of the breaking news staff that won Pulitzers in 1998, 2004 and 2016.