

Star Lawyer Lehot Accused of Sexually Assaulting Colleague

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Max Abelson

DLA Piper attorney Vanina Guerrero accused Louis Lehot, a top Silicon Valley lawyer at her firm, of sexual assault in a letter to her bosses and a filing to a federal agency.

Guerrero asked Roger Meltzer and Jay Rains, the firm's Americas co-chairmen, to let her go to court instead of having to press her case in the secretive arbitration system.

"I experienced such horrific conduct at the hands of a senior male partner and deserve to openly litigate my claims," she wrote in the letter, which was shared with Bloomberg. She also detailed accusations of assault in a filing to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which polices discrimination in the workplace, according to her lawyer Jeanne Christensen at Wigdor LLP.

"We are aware of these allegations by one of our partners and take them seriously," said Josh Epstein, a spokesman for DLA Piper. "As soon as we were notified of the allegations, we took appropriate steps to investigate them. This process is ongoing." Lehot, Meltzer and Rains didn't respond to an email.

Guerrero said Lehot assaulted her in his hotel room in Shanghai less than two weeks after she joined last year as a junior partner. He assaulted her again in Brazil, Chicago and Palo Alto, she wrote. When she tried to fend off his advances, she said that he threatened to take her off deals.

After complaining to another executive, she says in the letter she was told to "talk it out" with Lehot and three other men, and was taken off a deal days later. That letter asked the firm to release her from an agreement that forces workers to take claims against bosses into arbitration, so that she can file claims "in our transparent court system."

Lehot, a specialist in venture capital and private equity, has done work for clients including SoftBank Group's Vision Fund, Slack Technologies Inc. and Goldman Sachs Group Inc.

Guerrero, who is married with two children, said in the letter that she immigrated from Colombia and helped her parents clean offices before attending college and law school.

When DLA Piper brought her on last year, its announcement included quotes from top attorneys there. One of them was Lehot himself: "Our clients recognize the value of working with lawyers like Vanina who bring deep global experience, creativity and high energy to the table."

(Updates with company's comment in the fourth paragraph.)