

Weinstein accusers challenge proposed settlement and call it 'cruel hoax'

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A group of Harvey Weinstein accusers have challenged a proposed 19 million dollar (about £15.1 million) settlement for his alleged victims and described it as a “cruel hoax”.

The agreement was announced last month by New York attorney general Letitia James and would resolve two lawsuits against the disgraced Hollywood producer.

The first one involves the Weinstein Company while the second is a separate class action lawsuit brought by women who say they were assaulted by the convicted rapist, who is serving a 23-year prison sentence.

The settlement, which was welcomed by some of Weinstein’s alleged victims, is awaiting approval from the bankruptcy and district courts.

However Douglas H Wigdor, Kevin Mintzer and Bryan Arbeit, who represent six women including Weinstein’s British former assistants Rowena Chiu and Zelda Perkins, filed their opposition to the settlement on Monday.

They described it as a “cruel hoax” and claimed the average payment to the accusers would be far smaller than the New York state attorney says.

Instead, the “main winners” would be the Weinsteins and the “ultra wealthy” former directors of their company.

If approved, it would result in “one of the most one-sided and unfair class settlements in history”, the lawyers argue, pointing to the fact Weinstein would not have to admit liability or pay towards the settlement.

The settlement would be funded by a group of insurance companies.

In a statement, the lawyers added: “The efforts being made to prevent women from continuing with their litigation and holding those responsible for their trauma accountable are simply unprecedented.

“We are heartened by the growing opposition to this settlement and are hopeful that it will be rejected.”

The objection was filed at the US District Court in New York. A representative for Weinstein said the settlement was the best deal his accusers were likely to get.

Weinstein's lawyer Imran Ansari said in a statement to Variety: "The practical reality is that those who opt out of the settlement face an uncertain financial recovery, with the Weinstein Company bankrupt, and Mr Weinstein defending legal matters, facing debt and judgments, frozen assets, marital and child support obligations, and a line of creditors looking for compensation.

"Mr Weinstein's current and future financial state is far from healthy – not only has his personal liberty been taken from him, but his financial liberty as well."

The proposed victims' compensation fund is 18,875,000 dollars, said Ms James, who has been contacted for comment. It would allow women who say they were assaulted by Weinstein to claim for damages confidentially.

As part of the agreement, Weinstein's accusers would be freed from any confidentiality or non-disclosure agreements they signed with the Weinstein Company or any representative of the company related to alleged sexual misconduct by Weinstein.

The attorney general's office launched legal action against Weinstein and his brother Bob in February 2018 for "maintaining a hostile work environment" at their company.

Harvey Weinstein was once one of the most powerful and feared men in Hollywood before his downfall was triggered by a flood of sexual assault allegations in October 2017.

He was convicted of rape in February following a trial in New York. He faces further charges in Los Angeles.