

Former Apollo CEO Accused Of Rape, Defamation In NY Suit

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Leon Black, the billionaire former CEO of Apollo Global Management with ties to Jeffrey Epstein, was hit with a lawsuit in a New York state court Tuesday by a woman claiming he sexually assaulted her, forced her into a nondisclosure agreement and falsely told the press she had extorted him.

Guzel Ganieva — a native of Russia who had worked as a model — sued for defamation, emotional distress and gender-motivated violence under New York City's Gender Motivated Violence Act, calling Black a "sadist." She went public with the sexual harassment and assault allegations on Twitter in March, according to the suit.

Black told Bloomberg News in April that the affair was consensual, that Ganieva was the one extorting him and that he had asked for a criminal investigation. But Black was the one demanding silence in exchange for "hush money" in the form of nearly \$1 million in loans he knew Ganieva couldn't pay off, according to the lawsuit.

"No matter the physical distance between them, Ms. Ganieva continued to feel threatened by Black and his power over her," the suit said. "Of course, this was precisely what he wanted."

Black, who also recently came under fire for his relationship with convicted sex offender Epstein, **left Apollo earlier this year** after those ties came to light, citing his own health and that of his wife's.

Ganieva said that Black forced himself on her for the first time in 2008 in a studio apartment with a mattress on the floor, then trapped her in an orbit of dependence and what the lawsuit described as painful and "sadistic sexual acts ... without her consent and despite her saying no."

The suit noted that Black's physical size, which it pinned at 6-foot-5 and more than 300 pounds, made it hard for Ganieva to escape him.

Ganieva also claimed that Black raped her at her apartment in July 2014 while she was "debilitated" from an illness.

According to the suit, Black loaned Ganieva \$480,000 on two occasions, once in 2011 and again in 2013. The suit said Black used Ganieva's desire to finish her college degree as motivation to get her to agree to the first loan.

Black also set up Ganieva with "sham" job interviews, she said, from which she never got a position and which the suit said were a tool to keep her dependent on him.

In 2015, the year before the first loan was supposed to have been repaid, Ganieva, a single mother who did not have the nearly \$1 million dollars she needed to repay the loans, told Black she wanted him to "leave her and her child alone, for good," according to the suit.

But Black was "relentless" and threatened her and her child if she didn't take the money. If she refused, he'd make sure she went to prison or "destroy her life," the suit said.

Black also forced Ganieva to sign a piece of paper in exchange for him forgiving the loans, the suit said. But she said she didn't understand what the document was and isn't sure what all it said, only that it had something to do with confidentiality. She also signed a second piece of paper that may have been a copy, according to the suit.

Black did not sign the document and did not give her a copy, and then regularly deposited money into her bank account using an account called E Trust, according to the suit.

Then Black said, "[I will be paying you] as long as you keep your mouth shut," according to the suit.

The suit accused Black of making his April statement to Bloomberg News — a few weeks after she posted her allegations on Twitter — "with malice."

Ganieva's attorney, Jeanne Christensen, said she hasn't seen the documents her client said she signed.

"She 100% believed that was a legally enforceable document," she said.

Black could not immediately be reached for comment Tuesday.

Ganieva is represented by Jeanne M. Christensen and Lindsay M. Goldbrum of Wigdor LLP.

Counsel information for Black was not immediately available Tuesday.

The case is Guzel Ganieva v. Leon Black, in the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of New York. The case does not yet have an index number.