

# Jeffrey Epstein associate Leon Black faces defamation suit | Miami Herald

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By Julie K. Brown

A New York woman has filed a defamation lawsuit against Leon Black, alleging that the hedge fund titan sexually assaulted, harassed and intimidated her, then paid her hundreds of thousands of dollars in hush money for more than a decade to keep her from going public.

Guzel Ganieva, a former model who went on to earn a business degree from Columbia and attended law school, claims that Black, former CEO of Apollo Global Management, was a “predator” who “forced sadistic sexual acts on her without her consent,” then demanded she sign a non-disclosure agreement, telling her he would “destroy her” if she ever told anyone about his conduct, according to the suit.

Black, 69, stepped down as Apollo’s chairman and CEO in January, amid revelations that he paid sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein more than \$150 million for financial advice.

Black has denied Ganieva’s allegations, which she first made on Twitter in April.

“Ms. Ganieva’s allegations of harassment and other inappropriate behavior are categorically untrue,” a Black spokesman said in a statement. “This frivolous lawsuit is riddled with lies, and is nothing more than wholesale fiction. The truth is that Leon Black had a wholly consensual relationship with Ms. Ganieva for six years.”

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

The complaint, filed Tuesday in New York County Supreme Court, describes how Ganieva met Black in 2008 when she was in her 20s at an International Women’s Day event in New York City. Then a single mother who had emigrated from Russia, Ganieva accepted Black’s invitation to dine with him after he led her to believe that he would help her move beyond her modeling career, connecting her with prospective Wall Street employers and assisting her with applications to law school. Over the course of several dinners, Black promised to arrange appointments with his various business contacts and Ganieva “naïvely” believed that his association with her was purely platonic, the suit says.

“It was not long before he managed to secure his ability to get Ms. Ganieva alone with him,” the lawsuit alleges, where he violently raped her in a studio apartment with a mattress on the floor.

“In a sad, but predictable pattern, for the next several years Ms. Ganieva endured a cycle of intimidation, abuse and humiliation by Black,” including repeated sexual assaults, the suit claims.

Ganieva tried multiple times to distance herself from Black, and even cut off her hair in order to appear less attractive to him, the suit alleges. Each time, however, he would apologize, make more promises, and induce her to meet with him again, it says. From 2011 to 2013, he loaned her \$960,000, which he paid in monthly increments of \$60,000, according to the loan agreements attached to the lawsuit. The suit claims that the payments were actually hush money disguised as loans because Black knew that there was no way that Ganieva would be able to repay them.

“It’s very textbook, the way he operated, how he gave loans and he used the very fact of giving her money to threaten her,” said her lawyer, Jeanne Christensen.

Black earlier issued a statement that Ganieva had been extorting him over a consensual affair.

Christensen said her client filed the lawsuit in response to Black’s allegations of extortion, which he said he has reported to law enforcement.

“Mr. Black was... 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,” Black’s spokesman said.

Ganieva’s attorney countered that Black’s story about extortion doesn’t make sense.

“How can he say he was afraid of a ‘consensual affair?’” Christensen said. “He had numerous girlfriends. That was no secret. What would she have over his head?”

Ganieva claims that Black often appeared in public with her, taking her to five-star restaurants, Broadway shows, art and museum exhibits, parties, movie premiers and a New York Knicks game at Madison Square Garden.

“In the midst of all these very public outings, Black never once worried about sparing his family from public embarrassment,” the lawsuit said, adding in a footnote: “Nor did he care about being seen out with other young women, often of Russian descent, in addition to Ms. Ganieva.”

Records show that Ganieva received regular payments from an account labeled “E Trust” until April 2021.

“[I will be paying you] as long as you keep your mouth shut,” Black told her, according to the suit.

The tipping point for Ganieva came in October 2020, when Black publicly stated — in response to questions that were raised about his relationship with Epstein — that he had never been accused of any wrongdoing.

“Having recently educated herself in law school and knowing that many of his sexual acts were against her will and without her consent, [Ganieva] no longer was willing to stand by and allow him to escape accountability,” the lawsuit said.

Ganieva then made a public statement on Twitter about Black’s conduct, which led Black to make a pre-emptive claim of extortion, the lawsuit alleges.

“For too long, wealthy men like Black have enjoyed an unequal access to justice unavailable to the average citizen and non-millionaires. Knowing the right lawyers and politicians provided Black with the ability to do exactly what he said,” which was to threaten criminal charges against Ganieva, the lawsuit says.