

“You Have to Let Them Do Whatever They Want”: Billionaire Leon Black Flew a Russian Model to Meet Jeffrey Epstein, New Legal Filing Claims

VF [vanityfair.com/news/2021/08/billionaire-leon-black-flew-russian-model-to-meet-jeffrey-epstein-new-legal-filing-claims](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/08/billionaire-leon-black-flew-russian-model-to-meet-jeffrey-epstein-new-legal-filing-claims)

Gabriel Sherman

August 9, 2021

In early October 2008, the world’s financial system teetered on the brink of collapse. Congress raced to pass the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout. Millions of Americans were being thrown out of work. And according to a new legal filing, billionaire **Leon Black**, the former CEO of private equity behemoth Apollo Global Management, was flying a Russian model from New York to Palm Beach, Florida, to meet Jeffrey Epstein for the first time.

The former model, **Guzel Ganieva**, makes the shocking allegation that Black trafficked her to Epstein in an amended complaint that’s the latest salvo in her ongoing lawsuit against Black. In June, Ganieva sued Black in New York State Court. She alleged that Black defamed her when he publicly denied her claims that he “sexually harassed and abused” her, then pressured her to sign a nondisclosure agreement and paid her to keep quiet. Black told *Bloomberg* in April that he “foolishly had a consensual affair” with Ganieva but strenuously denied abusing her. Ganieva’s original lawsuit included graphic allegations that Black raped her in 2014 and that Black possesses a “violent, abusive, predatory, vindictive and brutal side...that he has shielded from public view for decades.”

In July, Black’s lawyers filed a 52-page response to Ganieva’s lawsuit. It called Ganieva’s suit “a work of fiction,” stated that Ganieva had extorted Black, and mysteriously hinted that she is working for “a third party who might wish Mr. Black ill.” Black’s lawyers say they have text messages and audio recordings that prove Ganieva isn’t telling the truth.

Ganieva’s attorney, **Jeanne Christensen**, said, “If Black believes that his billions will allow him to escape liability for his ruthless treatment of Guzel Ganieva, he is sorely mistaken.”

The disturbing claims and counterclaims are the latest stain on Black’s once pristine public image that has been sullied by his reported ties to Epstein. In January, the then 69-year-old Black [stunned](<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-22/leon-black-steps-down-as-apollo-ceo-succeeded-by-marc-rowan>) Wall Street by announcing he would step down as CEO of Apollo, the firm he founded. An investigation commissioned by Apollo’s board of directors had uncovered that Black paid Epstein \$158 million in fees between 2012 and 2017—*after* Epstein pleaded guilty to soliciting prostitution from a teenage girl.

Black’s \$158 million payments to Epstein amounted to less than 2% of Black’s reported \$10 billion net worth. The staggering sum Black paid Epstein, a college dropout and former high school math teacher, for “tax advice” and “estate planning” fueled rampant speculation among bankers that there must be a lot more to Epstein and Black’s relationship. The rumor

mill spun faster in late March, when Black abruptly left Apollo months earlier than expected and then stepped down from the board of New York City's Museum of Modern Art. It was a stunning fall for Black, whom *Bloomberg* once dubbed "the most feared man in the most aggressive realm of finance."

Throughout, Black maintained that his relationship with Epstein was strictly professional and that, while they socialized together, he knew nothing about the convicted pedophile's sexual abuse. "I was completely unaware of Mr. Epstein's abhorrent misconduct that came to light in late 2018," Black said in January, adding: "I did not engage in any wrongdoing or inappropriate conduct."

But Ganieva's latest court filing alleges, for the first time, that Black "made multiple comments to Ms. Ganieva about Epstein's sexual proclivities." The lawsuit claims Black told Ganieva that Epstein flew "very young girls" aboard his private plane. The suit doesn't say whether Black knew if any of these girls were under 18. It claims, though, that Black told Ganieva that Epstein made money because "he takes care of the little girls" and was "doing a great job with it." According to the complaint, Black had at least one sexual relationship with another Russian woman he met through Epstein.

Most shocking, however, is Ganieva's allegation that Black flew her "to Florida without her consent, to satisfy the sex needs of Epstein, his 'best friend.'"

Black's attorney, **Dayna Perry**, said in regard to the new claims that "Ms. Ganieva had six years to prepare her initial complaint in this case ... She now claims to recall in August supposedly crucial events and connections that somehow had slipped her mind at the time of her June filing. But just like her June complaint, Ms. Ganieva's story today is demonstrably and transparently false and betrays her willingness to say anything and fabricate a story in the hope something will stick."

According to Ganieva, the incident happened in October 2008, several months after she met Black. She states that Black invited her to lunch in Manhattan, but when he picked her up, he instead told her he was taking her to Florida to meet an unnamed friend. Black allegedly drove Ganieva to Teterboro Airport in New Jersey, where they boarded a private plane. Ganieva states that once they were on the jet, Black told her they were flying to Palm Beach to meet his "friend" Epstein. (To pinpoint the date of the flight, Ganieva's lawyers say they have subpoenaed flight records from Teterboro and Palm Beach International airports.)

Ganieva alleges Black told her not to tell anyone about the trip and, bizarrely, threatened to frame her for drug possession if she did. "Black specifically used heroin as an example of an illicit drug that would be problematic for her if he planted it on her," the lawsuit states.

In Palm Beach, Ganieva alleges Black drove her to a mansion that was being guarded by a sheriff's deputy. As part of Epstein's sweetheart plea deal in 2008 that shielded him from federal prosecution, a judge granted Epstein work-release privileges that allowed him to

leave the county lockup for 12 hours a day. Epstein reportedly spent some of this time in his home at 358 El Brillo Way when in fact he should have been at his office. Epstein also reportedly had sexual encounters with young women during work release.

Ganieva states that when they arrived at Epstein's mansion, Epstein's assistant, **Sarah Kellen**, greeted them. Ganieva claims Black and Epstein were almost lying down. According to the lawsuit:

Black and Epstein were situated close to one another, each facing Ms. Ganieva while in almost supine positions, as if they were waiting for her to get on top of them. Indeed, Black indicated with his eyes that he wanted Ms. Ganieva to come and lay in between him and Epstein. Alarmed and shocked, Ms. Ganieva remembers standing in front of them unable to say anything while they just stared up at her, saying nothing, but clearly expecting her to *do something*...As she continued to stand there in silence, Black became visibly annoyed. He eventually told her to leave the room.

Ganieva claims that after the unsettling encounter she went to the living room. "You have to understand that [Jeffrey and Leon] are sex addicts," Kellen said, according to the lawsuit. "You have to let them do whatever they want with you, and you have to let them be with multiple sexual partners if that's what they want. They are very powerful, and if you don't do what they want you to do, there will be consequences that I do not want for you." Ganieva states she told Kellen she wouldn't have sex with Epstein. The stay in Palm Beach lasted no more than two hours, Ganieva claims. She alleges Black did not speak to her on the flight back to New York.

Over the years, Ganieva states Black pressured her to have threesomes—which she refused to do—and that he performed "sadistic" sex acts on her (the specific acts are redacted in the suit). "On some occasions, the pain was so extreme that Ms. Ganieva believes she lost consciousness or fainted," the lawsuit says. Ganieva alleges they would usually meet at a studio apartment Black either owned or rented across the street from his family's apartment on East 72nd Street.

Black often brought up Epstein in conversation and would frequently text with Epstein in her presence, the lawsuit states. Ganieva alleges Black told her in 2014, years after meeting Epstein: "you are too old for [Epstein], he likes them young."

The lawsuit says Black even invoked Epstein when Black leaned on Ganieva to sign a nondisclosure agreement in 2015. "Black would warn that Ms. Ganieva would 'die' if she ever spoke about Epstein and Epstein's relationship with Black and that he would pay people to destroy Ms. Ganieva's life if she ever did so," the lawsuit says.