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Apollo Co-Founder Leon Black Accused in New Suit of Rape in Epstein Mansion

- Virginia woman files suit under NY's new Adult Survivors Act
- Black's lawyer calls latest allegations 'categorically false'



- Leon Black
- *Photographer: Patrick T. Fallon/Bloomberg*
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Apollo Global Management co-founder Leon Black was sued by a woman who claims the billionaire raped her in 2002 in Jeffrey Epstein's Manhattan townhouse.

The lawsuit, in which Cheri Pierson of Virginia alleges Black assaulted her after Epstein introduced them, was filed Monday in state court in New York by the same law firm representing former Russian model Guzel Ganieva. Ganieva, who also claims Black raped her, sued him last year, accusing him of defamation for calling their relationship a "consensual affair" and claiming she had extorted money from him over it.

Pierson's suit, which names Epstein's estate as a defendant as well, adds another layer of litigation to the acrimonious dispute between Black and Ganieva. It began when she wrote on Twitter in March 2021 that she was "sexually harassed and abused by him for years."

Black has denied harassing or assaulting Ganieva. On Monday, his lawyer Susan Estrich called Pierson's claims false as well.

"These latest allegations from the Wigdor firm are categorically false," Estrich said in a statement, citing a "serial abuse of the judicial process" and vowing to "defeat these baseless claims, and to pursue all of our remedies."

A lawyer for Epstein's estate didn't respond to an email seeking comment on the suit.

The complaint was filed shortly after a new law, New York's Adult Survivors Act, took effect. The law, which comes in the wake of the #MeToo movement, lifts the statute of limitations for one year on civil claims for alleged sexual offenses. The suit is one of the first tests of the law, along with a battery complaint filed against Donald Trump by

E. Jean Carroll, the New York author who claims he raped her in the 1990s. Trump has denied the claims.

Black, 71, stepped away from leading Apollo the month of Ganieva's tweet amid controversy over his relationship with Epstein, whom he had paid \$158 million for various financial services. He denied Ganieva's accusations but said he had made payments to her for years to keep their affair secret. Epstein, charged with sex trafficking, died in jail in 2019 while awaiting trial, in what was ruled a suicide.

Black then sued Ganieva, Apollo co-founder Josh Harris and public relations professional Steven Rubenstein, claiming they had violated civil racketeering laws by scheming to destroy him personally and professionally. That suit was thrown out in June by a federal judge who called the racketeering claims "glaringly deficient." Black is appealing the dismissal.

The Apollo co-founder filed a separate suit against Ganieva and her lawyers in October, saying a confidentiality agreement under which she had been paid more than \$9 million barred her from disclosing their relationship. He alleges her lawyers knew about the agreement and encouraged her to break it.

Pierson's allegations are similar to claims about Black's alleged treatment of a woman identified only as Jane Doe, first outlined in September 2021 in a proposed amended complaint in Ganieva's defamation case and repeated in the amended complaint itself, which was filed in May. Black has appealed the judge's decision allowing Ganieva to file the amended complaint and denying his motion to strike portions of it.

Single Mother

According to the new suit against Black, Pierson was a single mother living in New Jersey and commuting to Manhattan for a low-paying receptionist job in 2000 when she was contacted by an acquaintance,

a Ukrainian woman who urged her to meet with Epstein, saying he could help her financially.

Pierson said she initially ignored the calls but was then contacted by a woman named Maxwell who said Epstein was a “powerful businessman” who could help her, according to the complaint. The reference is to Ghislaine Maxwell, the close Epstein associate sentenced to 20 years in prison in her own sex trafficking case. Pierson eventually went to Epstein’s Manhattan townhouse on East 71st Street. There, Epstein paid her \$300 for a 20-minute massage performed in a bikini, more than she made in a week, and then asked her to perform oral sex on him, a request she refused, according to the complaint. Later, she says, he sent her \$300 and told her he was going to introduce her to someone who might be able to help her.

Back at the townhouse, she met Black, standing in the hallway in a business suit, according to the complaint. She alleges the two took the elevator up to Epstein’s massage room, where Black gave her \$300, partially disrobed, and raped her.

Pierson claims Black tried to reconnect with her and met with her twice at restaurants, at one point giving her \$5,000 to help her with credit card debt, but that she refused to see him again.

Ganieva last week lost a bid to disqualify a law firm representing Black, Perry Guha LLP, after Joan Illuzzi-Orbon -- a former prosecutor in the Manhattan district attorney’s office who investigated the allegations against Black -- joined the firm as a consultant. Perry Guha has said Illuzzi-Orbon isn’t involved in the Black litigation. Black was never charged.

The latest case is Pierson v. Black, New York State Supreme Court, New York County.