

A woman accused billionaire investor Leon Black of brutally raping her inside Jeffrey Epstein's New York mansion, according to a new lawsuit

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Leon Black speaks at the panel discussion "Global Opportunities in Private Equity" at The Milken Institute Global Conference in Beverly Hills, California, on May 2, 2011.

Fred Prouser/Reuters

- Cheri Pierson filed a lawsuit against billionaire investor Leon Black on Monday.
- She's accusing Black of raping her inside a private suite of Jeffrey Epstein's New York mansion.
- Black's attorney called the accusations "categorically false."

A Virginia woman is accusing billionaire investor Leon Black of brutally raping her inside Jeffrey Epstein's Manhattan mansion and leaving her in "excruciating pain," according to a lawsuit filed in a New York state court on Monday.

The woman, Cheri Pierson, claimed in her suit that Black, co-founder and former CEO of Apollo Global Management, raped her during a meeting in which she thought she would provide massage services for money "that she desperately needed to help care for her young daughter."

The lawsuit also alleges Ghislaine Maxwell, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison on June 28 for trafficking girls to have sex with Epstein, helped facilitate a meeting between the woman and Epstein about two years before the alleged assault.

Epstein faced charges of sex trafficking, but died by suicide on August 10, 2019, before he could stand trial. Black, whose net worth is estimated to be about \$9 billion, according to Forbes, stepped down as Apollo's CEO in 2021 after an independent investigation into the investor's ties with Epstein was conducted.

In a statement to Insider, Black's attorney Susan Estrich said that the allegations in Pierson's lawsuit "are categorically false and part of a scheme to extort money from Mr. Black by threatening to destroy his reputation."

The suit, which names Black and Epstein's estate as defendants, claimed that the incident occurred around the spring of 2002, on the third floor of Epstein's mansion where a private suite with a massage table and bathroom was located.

"By the time Ms. Pierson exited the massage suit and rode down the elevator with Black, she could barely walk out of the house onto the sidewalk, as she was in excruciating pain and still in shock," the lawsuit stated. "Black callously announced that his driver was waiting for him, turned his back and left her standing at the curb."

Pierson is the second woman to publicly accuse Black of sexual misconduct. Another, Guzel Ganieva, filed a lawsuit against the investor in 2021 accusing him of sexually abusing her throughout an extramarital affair for over a decade. Ganieva's lawsuit detailed a friendship between Black and Epstein, and alleged Black at one point pressured her into having an orgy together with him — which she says she refused.

Black has denied the misconduct allegations and said his relationship with Ganieva was consensual. He separately filed a countersuit against her and his former business partner Josh Harris, accusing them of cooking up the scheme to usurp him as Apollo's CEO. A judge dismissed the countersuit in June, ruling Black's claims weren't detailed enough to move the lawsuit to the discovery phase. Ganieva's lawsuit against Black remains pending.

Pierson's lawsuit says Epstein arranged a meeting between her and Black

Pierson is able to pursue legal action against Black due to New York's Adult Survivor's Act, which opened up the state's statute of limitations for abuse cases on November 24.

"Thanks to the passage of the Adult Survivor's Act, survivors of sexual violence like Ms. Pierson are able to seek the justice they deserve no matter how many years ago their trauma was suffered," Pierson's attorney Jeanne Christensen told Insider. "We look forward to holding Black and Epstein's estate accountable for their appalling unlawful conduct as alleged in the complaint by our client."

The complaint further alleged that Epstein arranged the meeting between Pierson and Black.

Several weeks before the alleged attack, Epstein told Pierson that he was setting her up to meet with a "powerful and wealthy man," while implying that the individual could provide financial support to her, the lawsuit said. The comment was made in the context of discussing Pierson's aspiring skin care product line.

Epstein did not disclose the identity of the man and Black would not share his name until after the meeting, according to the suit.

A massage table photographed in Jeffrey Epstein's mansion as part of a July 2019 FBI search. The photo was included as an exhibit in Ghislaine Maxwell's trial.

FBI

The lawsuit said that once Pierson was inside the mansion and discreetly led up to the massage suite by Black, he "wasted no time before inflicting violence on Ms. Pierson."

Black gave Pierson \$300 for the massage, took off his pants, unbuttoned his shirt, and left his socks on, the lawsuit alleged. Pierson also claimed in the suit that she was told to completely undress.

The complaint goes into the alleged rape in excruciating detail.

At one point, after saying he wanted to "orally copulate" Pierson, Black used his body weight — 6'4" and 300 pounds, according to the lawsuit — to take Pierson by "surprise and force ... into a position where she was rendered physically helpless," the lawsuit claimed. In contrast, Pierson was 125 pounds and 5 feet, 8 inches at the time.

Pierson recalled "desperately yelling and screaming" during the alleged attack.

"She tried to kick. She struggled to free her legs from his vicious grip, but he was too strong. Unquestionably, he knew she did not consent," the lawsuit claims.

Pierson, who did not have health insurance at the time, was left in physical pain for some time, according to the suit.

Weeks after the alleged incident, the lawsuit claimed that Black repeatedly tried to contact Pierson because "he just wanted to talk."

After refusing, Pierson reluctantly agreed to meet with him in a restaurant but soon abruptly left after becoming overwhelmed with emotion when seeing Black.

"Ms. Pierson was not prepared for how upset she became when she saw Black and started reliving the sexual assault," the lawsuit said.

Ghislaine Maxwell urged Pierson to meet Epstein, the lawsuit says

Black made more attempts to contact and meet with Pierson. The second time Pierson agreed to meet with Black, the investor gave Pierson \$5,000 in 100 dollar bills, the lawsuit alleged.

"Black told her that the money was to help with her credit card debt," the lawsuit said.

Outside of a chance encounter with the investor in Manhattan's Upper East Side, Pierson did not meet with Black again.

Pierson was connected to Epstein by Maxwell about two years prior to the alleged attack, the lawsuit said.

At the time, Pierson was a single mother working as a receptionist and faced financial setbacks, including credit card debt, according to the lawsuit. She also had aspirations to launch a skin care product line but lacked the capital to do so, the lawsuit said.

One woman who Pierson met at work began to suggest meeting with a "wealthy man" who "helped women like Ms. Pierson financially," according to the lawsuit.

Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein pose for a portrait during a party at the Mar-a-Lago club, Palm Beach, Florida, February 12, 2000.

Davidoff Studios/Getty Images

Pierson soon began receiving calls from another woman also urging her to meet with the wealthy businessman. The lawsuit claimed that the woman was named Maxwell and had a British accent. Pierson assumed that the acquaintance she met at work gave Maxwell her

contact information without her consent.

"The caller named 'Maxwell,' told Ms. Pierson that she really should meet Epstein. Maxwell implied that she knew that Ms. Pierson needed money and suggested that as a powerful businessman, Epstein was someone that could "help" Ms. Pierson," the lawsuit alleged.

Pierson eventually agreed to meet with Maxwell and Epstein. According to the suit, Pierson recalled Maxwell describing Epstein as someone who "picks models for Victoria's Secret."

When Pierson met Epstein, she recalled in the suit how he would describe himself as a philanthropist who "make[s] money for rich guys." Pierson was about to tell Epstein about her skincare product when Epstein then said, according to the suit, "I am a massage slut...I get 2-3 massages a day, lots of women do it and they do very well."

Epstein offered to pay Pierson \$300 to give him a massage in a bikini for 20 minutes and Pierson agreed to do so, the lawsuit claimed. Pierson provided massage services for Epstein at least four other times throughout 2001.

The lawsuit also alleged that Epstein masturbated and wanted Pierson to perform oral sex on him as part of the massage. She declined each time, the lawsuit said.

Around 2002, in desperate need of money, Pierson contacted Epstein for help. The lawsuit said Epstein provided Pierson with a card that contained \$300. Soon afterward, it continued. Epstein connected Pierson with an unnamed businessman who would turn out to be the Apollo Global Management co-founder.