

Letitia James Protected Aide From Harassment Claims, Lawsuit Charges

[nytimes.com/2022/12/15/nyregion/letitia-james-lawsuit-sexual-harassment.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/15/nyregion/letitia-james-lawsuit-sexual-harassment.html)

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The New York attorney general, Letitia James, continued to employ her longtime chief of staff in spite of his “known propensity to sexually harass and to commit sexual assault and batteries,” according to a lawsuit filed Thursday by a former aide to Ms. James.

The former aide, [Sofia Quintanar](#), filed the lawsuit against Ms. James, her campaign, the office of the attorney general and Ibrahim Khan, Ms. James’s former chief of staff [who resigned](#) during an investigation into charges that he groped and kissed Ms. Quintanar and at least one other former employee of Ms. James’s office against their will.

The lawsuit, filed in both State Supreme Court in Manhattan and the State Court of Claims, seeks damages for the loss of income, embarrassment and pain and suffering that Ms. Quintanar said she endured as a result of the incident.

The filing, which recounts the harassment [first reported](#) by The New York Times and substantiated by an outside law firm hired by Ms. James’s office, accuses the office of protecting Mr. Khan by allowing him to resign without being fired and of lying to the media about why he was absent from the office.

“With the filing of this complaint, I hope to increase the visibility and strength of women of color having a voice in the #MeToo movement,” Ms. Quintanar, 33, said in a statement to The Times. “We are less likely to come forward in these situations because those in positions of power have historically thought less of us.”

Image

Sofia Quintanar said she hoped her lawsuit would prompt other women to publicize incidents of sexual harassment. Credit...Sarah Blesener for The New York Times

Ms. Quintanar’s lawyer, Douglas H. Wigdor, suggested that Ms. James and her office violated the state’s human rights law because they failed to meet the obligation to not employ people who they know or should have known might engage in sexual harassment.

“I think that there’s actually compelling evidence that Tish James knew or should have known about his conduct and propensity and should have taken steps to make sure that didn’t happen,” said Mr. Wigdor. “Whether that be not hiring him or not having him go to off sites without supervision or terminating his employment.”

Ms. James’s office and Mr. Khan did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but last week Mr. Khan, through his lawyer, denied the allegations of abuse. Ms. James has said that she was unaware of Mr. Khan’s conduct but that she “treated this matter as aggressively as every other matter that has come before our office” and that she believed Ms. Quintanar’s allegation and took it very seriously.

“I’m deeply disappointed in him. And there’s no excuse for his behavior at all. None whatsoever,” Ms. James said in an interview with NY1 last week. “I believe these women. I believe their allegations. And it just, it angers me.”

Ms. Quintanar, a former deputy press secretary for Ms. James who left the attorney general’s office in 2021, told The Times that she encountered Mr. Khan, her former co-worker, at a political fund-raiser in Brooklyn in November 2021. She said Mr. Khan aggressively grabbed her by the shoulder and forcefully “stuck his tongue down my throat” while they were outside the bar discussing politics.

In a statement to the New York Post this week, Ms. Quintanar said that her issue “has never been with Attorney General Letitia James or how the investigation was handled.” Mr. Wigdor said those comments were referencing the investigation and not Ms. James’s “underlying conduct or what she ultimately permitted Mr. Khan to do on his pending exit.”

The lawsuit claims that Ms. James and her office had kept Mr. Khan on “in spite of his known tendency to commit sexual assaults and to sexually harass women.” The claim stems from the fact that Mr. Khan had been accused previously of sexual assault when he worked as Ms. James’s chief of staff in the public advocate’s office.

In 2017, The Post reported that a former employee of the office accused Mr. Khan of drugging her and sexually assaulting her at a holiday party. The allegation was investigated by the Manhattan district attorney's office and the city's Department of Investigation. Both closed their inquiries without filing charges.

The article about the incident is no longer available on The Post's website, and the paper, in a subsequent article about Mr. Khan, said the piece was removed because the newspaper had learned that the woman "had no memory of who the attacker was" and had not identified Mr. Khan as her attacker. A spokeswoman for The Post has declined to comment further.

Ms. James, in her NY1 interview, said the allegations in The Post article were investigated and found to be "unsubstantiated."

The lawsuit alleges that Mr. Khan violated both the city and state's human rights laws and that Mr. Khan is liable for "assault and battery."

Ms. James's office was made aware of the allegations against Mr. Khan on Oct. 2, according to a timeline released by the office. On Oct. 3, Mr. Khan was told that he should begin to work remotely. The next day, the office hired the law firm Littler Mendelson to conduct an independent investigation.

Mr. Khan tendered his resignation on Nov. 22, and a note from the office's director of human resources said that his resignation would take effect on Dec. 31, but that Mr. Khan had ceased involvement in "any official office matter" on Dec. 2, the same day The Times first reported the allegations against him. The suit notes that Ms. Quintanar had also inquired about an update on the status of the investigation on Nov. 22, a message that was reviewed by The Times.

Jonah E. Bromwich and William K. Rashbaum contributed reporting.