

# NY attorney general Letitia James sued after former adviser's #MeToo exit

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New York Attorney General Letitia James speaks during a news conference in New York on Sept. 21.

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A woman who accused a former top adviser to New York Attorney General Letitia James of unwanted kissing filed a lawsuit Tuesday alleging the Democrat and her office ignored previous warnings about his behavior.

Sofia Quintanar, a political consultant and former deputy press secretary in James' office, alleges former Chief of Staff Ibrahim Khan thrust his face in front of hers and

“stuck his tongue down her throat” as they were chatting outside a political fundraiser at a Brooklyn bar last year.

Khan resigned Dec. 2, about two months after Quintanar first lodged her complaint with the attorney general’s office about his behavior. He has denied wrongdoing.

In her lawsuit, Quintanar alleges that James and her office were aware that Khan had a “propensity to sexually harass and to commit sexual assaults” and they were negligent in hiring and supervising him.

Quintanar had previously credited James’ office for taking swift action after she reported the incident, telling the New York Post last week that her issue “has never been with Attorney General Letitia James or how the investigation was handled.”

A message seeking comment was left with Khan’s lawyer.

James’ office said in a statement that it “took the allegations brought to our office seriously and engaged in decisive, prompt, and appropriate action.”

Khan had been one of James’ closest confidantes for nearly a decade, dating to her successful campaign for New York City public advocate in 2013. The allegations against him are a rare crisis for the Democrat. Last year, James oversaw a sexual harassment probe that led to former Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s resignation. After that, she briefly ran for governor before opting for reelection. Some Cuomo allies and state Republicans now want her investigated.

After Quintanar reported Khan’s alleged forcible kissing to James’ reelection campaign in October, the attorney general’s office hired a law firm to investigate her allegations, and claims by another woman who had previously worked for James.

Khan was told to stay home during the investigation, which started in the final weeks of James’ successful reelection campaign. In a Nov. 22 memo, Khan wrote that he would be leaving for a private sector job at the end of the year, but he departed immediately once the allegations were substantiated.

Quintanar, in her lawsuit, suggests James’ office was covering for Khan — telling reporters that he was on vacation or visiting a sick relative while he was under

investigation — and attempting to give him a soft exit.

The lawsuit was filed in state court under New York's Adult Survivors Act, which temporarily sets aside time limits to bring lawsuits for adults who were sexually assaulted. Her lawyer, Douglas Wigdor, explained that was done because the accusations say the assault happened just beyond the one-year statute of limitations.

Quintanar said she was torn about reporting Khan, and waited nearly a year to do so, because she feared he would use his power to harm her career. Ultimately, she said, Khan did use his power against her by blocking her from getting a job as a communications strategist for James' campaign. That, she said, prompted her to come forward.

Quintanar alleges Khan assaulted her in November 2021 while James and other prominent Brooklyn Democrats were inside the bar attending a political fundraiser.

Quintanar said she went to the event, in part, because she was looking for a new job after helping Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown win reelection and was hoping to network with people who could help her find work. She was not working for James or her campaign at the time.

After Khan started kissing her, Quintanar said she pushed Khan away, asking him, "Aren't you married?" and "Don't you have kids? What are you doing?"

Quintanar said a political contact later told her that Khan had a "sketchy" reputation and alerted her to a prior allegation, in a since-deleted New York Post article, that he had drugged and sexually assaulted a woman at a party while working at the public advocate's office in 2017.

The Post, in a recent article, said the previous story was removed because the accuser "had not actually identified Khan as the person who drugged and assaulted her, and that she had said she had no memory of who the attacker was."

The New York Times reported that the the allegation detailed in the Post article was investigated by both the Manhattan district attorney and a city watchdog agency, but that neither brought charges.

Quintanar said she filed the lawsuit with the hope of increasing “the visibility and strength of women of color having a voice in the #MeToo movement.”

“We are less likely to come forward in these situations because those in positions of power have historically thought less of us,” Quintanar said. “While I fear the effect that this might have on my career, I know that fear should never stand in the way of doing what is right.”

James issued a statement last week defending her office’s handling of the matter, saying she is “confident in the steps that were taken to swiftly review the allegations and in the integrity of the investigation.”

“I thank the women who came forward, and I want to assure them that they were heard and that I believe them,” James said.

The AP does not typically identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they grant permission, as Quintanar has done.

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