

Sean Combs Is Accused by Cassie of Rape and Years of Abuse in Lawsuit

In the suit, the singer says Mr. Combs, known as Puff Daddy or Diddy, subjected her to a pattern of control and abuse over about a decade. Mr. Combs “vehemently” denied the allegations.



By Ben Sisario

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Sean Combs, the producer and music mogul who has been one of the most famous names in hip-hop for decades, was sued in federal court on Thursday by Cassie, an R&B singer once signed to his label, who accused Mr. Combs of rape, and of repeated physical abuse over about a decade.

In the suit, filed in Federal District Court in Manhattan, Cassie, whose real name is Casandra Ventura — and who had long been Mr. Combs’s romantic partner — says that not long after she met him in 2005, when she was 19, he began a pattern of control and abuse that included plying her with drugs, beating her and forcing her to have sex with a succession of male prostitutes while he filmed the encounters. In 2018, the suit says, near the end of their relationship, Mr. Combs forced his way into her home and raped her.

“After years in silence and darkness,” Ms. Ventura said in a statement, “I am finally ready to tell my story, and to speak up on behalf of myself and for the benefit of other women who face violence and abuse in their relationships.”

In response, a lawyer for Mr. Combs, Ben Brafman, said: “Mr. Combs vehemently denies these offensive and outrageous allegations. For the past six months, Mr. Combs has been subjected to Ms. Ventura’s persistent demand of \$30 million, under the threat of writing a damaging book about their relationship, which was unequivocally rejected as blatant blackmail. Despite withdrawing her initial threat, Ms. Ventura has now resorted to filing a lawsuit riddled with baseless and outrageous lies, aiming to tarnish Mr. Combs’s reputation and seeking a payday.”

Douglas Wigdor, a lawyer for Ms. Ventura, said the parties had spoken before the suit was filed. “Mr. Combs offered Ms. Ventura eight figures to silence her and prevent the filing of this lawsuit,” he said. “She rejected his efforts.”

Ms. Ventura’s case is the latest in a series of sexual assault civil suits filed recently against prominent men in the music industry, including Steven Tyler of Aerosmith, the executive L.A. Reid and Neil Portnow, the former head of the organization behind the Grammy Awards. (Mr. Portnow has denied the accusation; Mr. Tyler and Mr. Reid have not responded.)

Mr. Combs, 54, founded Bad Boy in 1993 and became one of the primary figures in the commercialization of hip-hop, working with stars like the Notorious B.I.G. and Mary J. Blige. His net worth has been estimated as high as \$1 billion, and last year Forbes calculated Mr. Combs’s annual earnings at \$90 million, attributing that amount largely to his former partnership in a liquor brand, Ciroc, that is owned by the spirits giant Diageo.

Mr. Combs, who in his career has variously been known as Puff Daddy, Diddy and Love, may be the most famous music executive of his generation. But the suit depicts Mr. Combs as a violent person who, beyond repeatedly assaulting Ms. Ventura, asked her to carry his gun in her purse, and the suit suggests he was responsible for blowing up the car of a rival suitor. In one incident, the suit says, Mr. Combs dangled a friend of Ms. Ventura’s over a 17th-floor hotel balcony.

In naming additional defendants, the court papers assert that others who worked with Mr. Combs had helped him to control Ms. Ventura, at times by threatening her with retribution — like suppressing her music if she did not obey his orders — or by helping to conceal his behavior. The suit, which names Mr. Combs and a number of his associated companies as defendants,

seeks unspecified damages.



“After years in silence and darkness,” Cassie, whose real name is Casandra Ventura, said in a statement, “I am finally ready to tell my story.”
Karwai Tang/WireImage, via Getty Images

According to Ms. Ventura’s suit, she was swept into Mr. Combs’s jet-set lifestyle not long after meeting him and signing with Bad Boy, which released her debut album in 2006.

But, the suit says, he soon began to assert an extraordinary level of command over her life. In addition to controlling her career, he paid for her car, apartments and clothing, and even had access to her personal medical records. According to the suit, the results from an M.R.I. scan she had — for memory loss, possibly caused by drug use or by a beating she said she suffered from Mr. Combs — went directly to Mr. Combs.

Mr. Combs also provided Ms. Ventura with “copious amounts of drugs,” including ecstasy and ketamine, and urged her to take them, the suit says, and often became violent, beating her “multiple times each year.” The suit says Ms. Ventura never went to the police because she feared it “would merely give Mr. Combs another excuse to hurt her.”

In one incident in Los Angeles in 2009, the suit says, Mr. Combs became enraged when he saw Ms. Ventura talking to another talent agent, then pushed her into a car and kicked her repeatedly in the face, making her bleed. According to the suit, Mr. Combs then had his staff bring her to a hotel room to recuperate for a week. She asked to go home to her parents, but Mr. Combs refused, the suit says.

The suit says that after seeing the violent repercussions of rejecting Mr. Combs, and the extent to which he would isolate her from her support network, “Ms. Ventura felt that saying ‘no’ to Mr. Combs would cost her something — her family, her friends, her career, or even her life.” And though she tried to leave Mr. Combs, the suit says he sent his employees to lure her back.

In one incident described in the court papers, Ms. Ventura says that in early 2012, Mr. Combs grew so angry about her dating the rapper Kid Cudi that he said he would blow up the rapper’s car. “Around that time,” the suit says, “Kid Cudi’s car exploded in his driveway.”

Through a spokeswoman, Kid Cudi confirmed Ms. Ventura’s account. “This is all true,” he said.

A few years into Ms. Ventura’s relationship with Mr. Combs, the suit says, he began coercing her “to engage in a fantasy of his called ‘voyeurism,’” in which she was directed to have sex with a succession of male prostitutes, while Mr. Combs watched, masturbated, took pictures and shot video.

According to the suit, Mr. Combs called these encounters “freak offs,” which involved costumes, like masquerade masks and lingerie. They continued for years, taking place at high-end hotels across the United States and in Mr. Combs’s homes. The suit says that he instructed Ms. Ventura to search the websites of escort services to procure male sex workers.

Drugs were supplied at these events, which Ms. Ventura’s suit says she took because they “allowed her to disassociate during these horrific encounters.”

According to the suit, Ms. Ventura would delete videos from these incidents that had been shot on her phone, but Mr. Combs told her he still had access to those videos, and on a flight once made her watch a video she thought she had deleted.

The suit says that as a result of these sexual encounters in different cities, Ms. Ventura was a victim of sex trafficking. The suit also accuses Mr. Combs of sexual battery, sexual assault and violations of New York City's gender-motivated violence law.

Ms. Ventura's suit includes several accounts of her unsuccessful attempts to escape Mr. Combs's control.

In one example, the suit says that during a "freak off" at a Los Angeles hotel in 2016, an intoxicated Mr. Combs punched Ms. Ventura in the face, giving her a black eye. He fell asleep and she tried to leave the room, but Mr. Combs woke up and followed her into the hallway, where he threw glass vases at her, sending glass shattering throughout the corridor, according to the court filing. The hotel's security cameras captured that incident, but the suit says Mr. Combs paid the hotel \$50,000 for the footage.

The court filing says that in 2018, after Mr. Combs and Ms. Ventura met for dinner, he forced himself into her apartment and raped her while she "repeatedly said 'no' and tried to push him away." After that, the suit says, she left him for good. Ms. Ventura married Alex Fine, a personal trainer, the following year and now has two young children. According to the complaint, her association with Bad Boy ended in 2019.

Ms. Ventura's case, like other recent sexual assault lawsuits, is being brought under the Adult Survivors Act, a New York law that allows people who say they were victims of sexual abuse to file civil suits after the statute of limitations has expired. The one-year window to bring cases under this law ends next week.

That law is cited in Ms. Ventura's complaint, and in a statement she addressed its importance.

"With the expiration of New York's Adult Survivors Act fast approaching," she said, "it became clear that this was an opportunity to speak up about the trauma I have experienced and that I will be recovering from for the rest of my life."

Ben Sisario covers the music industry. He has been writing for The Times since 1998. More about Ben Sisario