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Stormy Daniels Sues Ex-Lawyer, Saying He Colluded With Michael Cohen

Ex-porn star says former lawyer Keith Davidson served interests of Cohen and Trump, not hers

By Joe Palazzolo and Michael Rothfeld

Former adult-movie star Stephanie Clifford sued her former lawyer on Wednesday, alleging he served the interests of President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, instead of his client's when her \$130,000 hush-money agreement became public earlier this year.

The lawsuit alleged the lawyer, Keith Davidson, breached his fiduciary duty to Ms. Clifford, whose professional name is Stormy Daniels, by maintaining a cozy relationship with Mr. Cohen, "the purpose of which was not to benefit Ms. Clifford, but to benefit Mr. Cohen and Mr. Trump."

Mr. Davidson's lawyers, Gene Rossi and Michael Padula of the law firm Carlton Fields, denied the allegations and said the lawsuit cast suspicion on what was a normal professional relationship between two lawyers on opposite sides of a negotiated deal.

Mr. Rossi said the suit also was an effort by Ms. Clifford's current lawyer, Michael Avenatti, to distract from recent reports on his conduct in disputes with creditors and former law partners and other lawyers.

"This lawsuit is a shiny object that is part of his publicity tour to divert attention from the allegations made against him over the last several weeks," Mr. Rossi said. Mr. Avenatti, in turn, said Mr. Davidson was trying to "distract from his own unethical lapses." Brent Blakely, a lawyer for Mr. Cohen, who is also named as a defendant in the lawsuit, said Ms. Clifford's claims have "no merit whatsoever." The suit was filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court.

The Wall Street Journal reported in January that Mr. Cohen paid Ms. Clifford in the days before the 2016 presidential election to keep her quiet about an alleged affair with Mr. Trump. Five days after the story was published, celebrity magazine In Touch Weekly published a 2011 interview with Ms. Clifford in which she described the alleged sexual encounter. Mr. Cohen and the White House have denied that Mr. Trump had a sexual encounter with Ms. Clifford. Mr. Cohen tried to arrange for Ms. Clifford to appear on Fox News to contradict the In Touch story and deny the alleged affair, according to Ms. Clifford's lawsuit, which cites text messages Mr. Cohen sent to Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Cohen told Mr. Davidson in a Jan. 17 text message that he had “tentatively scheduled” Ms. Clifford to appear on Sean Hannity’s Fox News show later that night, according to the Complaint.

According to another text message filed with the suit, Mr. Davidson replied that Ms. Clifford couldn’t do the show. “She is flying to LA tomorrow. I’m trying to get her to commit for Tomorrow.”

Mr. Cohen sent texts imploring Mr. Davidson to call him. “This is no good. We need her as by doing tomorrow you just create another news cycle instead of putting an end to this one.” Later that night, Mr. Cohen announced a change of plans, according to the suit. “The wise men all believe the story is dying and don’t think it’s smart for her to do any interviews. Let her do her thing but no interview at all with anyone.”

“100%,” Mr. Davidson texted back.

The lawsuit alleged the phrase “wise men” included the president.

Representatives of Fox News and the White House didn’t respond to requests for comment. Fox News and The Wall Street Journal’s parent, News Corp, share common ownership.

The lawsuit alleged Mr. Davidson alerted Mr. Cohen in February as Ms. Clifford prepared to switch lawyers and speak publicly about her alleged affair with Mr. Trump. That shift prompted Mr. Cohen to seek a restraining order against her in arbitration, the lawsuit said. Mr. Davidson tipped Mr. Cohen off again weeks later, when Ms. Clifford was preparing to file a lawsuit to break free of her nondisclosure agreement, according to the lawsuit. That earlier suit is on hold pending a continuing criminal investigation into Mr. Cohen’s payment to Ms. Clifford and other Matters.

Text messages between Messrs. Cohen and Davidson included in an exhibit attached to the complaint show the men arranging to speak in early March. It isn’t clear from the lawsuit whether that conversation happened or not.

The lawsuit seeks damages in an amount to be determined at trial.