

# Jury Selection to Start Today, Signaling the Beginning of the Diddy Trial

Sean “Diddy” Combs, the hip-hop entrepreneur whose wildly successful career has been tarnished by allegations of sexual violence, will be brought to a New York courthouse Monday to be tried on charges that he used the influence and resources of his business empire to sexually abuse women.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin in the morning and potentially take several days. Opening statements by the lawyers and the start of testimony is expected next week.

The 17-page indictment against Combs read like a charging document filed against a Mafia leader or the head of a drug gang, accusing him of engaging in sex trafficking and presiding over a racketeering conspiracy.

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The indictment said that with the help of people in his entourage and employees from his network of businesses, Combs engaged in a two-decade pattern of abusive behavior against women and others.

Women were manipulated into participating in drug-fueled sexual performances with male sex workers that Combs called “Freak Offs,” prosecutors alleged.

To keep women in line, prosecutors said Combs used a mix of influence and violence: He offered to boost their entertainment careers if they did what he asked – or cut them off if they didn’t.

And when he wasn’t getting what he wanted, the indictment said

Combs and his associates resorted to violent acts including beatings, kidnapping, and arson. Once, the indictment alleged, he even dangled someone from a balcony.

Combs and his lawyers said he is innocent.

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Any group sex was consensual, they claimed. There was no effort to coerce people into things they didn't want to do, and nothing that happened amounted to a criminal racket, they said.

The trial is expected to take at least eight weeks.

Combs, 55, has acknowledged one episode of violence that is likely to be featured in the trial. In 2016, a security camera recorded him beating up his former girlfriend, the R&B singer Cassie, in the hallway of a Los Angeles hotel. Cassie filed a lawsuit in late 2023 saying Combs had subjected her to years of abuse, including beatings and rape.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly, as Cassie, whose legal name is Casandra Ventura, did.

Combs' attorney, Marc Agnifilo has said Combs was "not a perfect person" and that there had been drug use and toxic relationships but said that all sexual activity between Combs, Cassie, and other people was consensual.

The trial is the latest – and most serious – in a long string of legal problems for Combs.

In 1999, he was charged with bursting into the offices of an Interscope Records executive with his bodyguards and beating him with a champagne bottle and a chair. The executive, Steve

Stoute, later asked prosecutors to go easy on Combs, who pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and took an anger management class.

Later that same year, Combs was stopped by police after he and his then-girlfriend, Jennifer Lopez, fled a nightclub where three people were wounded by gunfire. Combs was acquitted of all charges related to the incident at a 2001 trial, but a rapper in his entourage, Jamal “Shyne” Barrow, was convicted in the shooting and served nearly nine years in prison.

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Then in 2015, Combs was charged with assaulting someone with a weight-room kettlebell at the University of California, Los Angeles, where one of his sons played football. Combs said he was defending himself, and prosecutors dropped the case.

Now, Combs faces his most serious case yet.

If convicted, he faces the possibility of decades in prison.

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