

THE CLINTON SERIAL SEX ABUSER SCOOP - BILL CLINTON HUNG OUT WITH EPSTEIN

On a muggy October morning in 2007, Miami's top federal prosecutor, Alexander Acosta, had a breakfast appointment with a former colleague, Washington, D.C., attorney Jay Lefkowitz.

It was an unusual meeting for the then-38-year-old prosecutor, a rising Republican star who had served in several White House posts before being named U.S. attorney in Miami by President George W. Bush.

Instead of meeting at the prosecutor's Miami headquarters, the two men — both with professional roots in the prestigious Washington law firm of Kirkland & Ellis — convened at the Marriott in West Palm Beach, about 70 miles away. For Lefkowitz, 44, a U.S. special envoy to North Korea and corporate lawyer, the meeting was critical.

His client, Palm Beach multimillionaire Jeffrey Epstein, 54, was accused of assembling a large, cult-like network of underage girls — with the help of young female recruiters — to [coerce into having sex acts behind the walls of his opulent waterfront mansion](#) as often as three times a day, the Town of Palm Beach police found.

At this home on El Brillo Way in Palm Beach, young girls, recruited by other young girls, would arrive by car or taxi, be

greeted in the kitchen by a member of Jeffrey Epstein's staff and ascend a staircase. They were met by Epstein, clad in a towel.
Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

The eccentric hedge fund manager, whose [friends included former President Bill Clinton, Donald Trump and Prince Andrew](#), was also suspected of trafficking minor girls, often from overseas, for sex parties at his other homes in Manhattan, New Mexico and the Caribbean, FBI and court records show.

 [Interactive image link](#)

[Interactive: Sex abuser Jeffrey Epstein was surrounded by powerful people. Here's a sampling](#)

Facing a 53-page federal indictment, Epstein could have ended up in federal prison for the rest of his life.

But on the morning of the breakfast meeting, a deal was struck — an extraordinary plea agreement that [would conceal the full extent of Epstein's crimes and the number of people involved](#).

Not only would Epstein serve just 13 months in the county jail, but the deal — called a non-prosecution agreement — essentially shut down an ongoing FBI probe into whether there were more victims and other powerful people who took part in Epstein's sex crimes, according to a Miami Herald examination of [thousands of emails, court documents and FBI records](#).

The pact required Epstein to plead guilty to two prostitution charges in state court. Epstein and four of his accomplices named in the agreement received immunity from all federal criminal charges. But even more unusual, the deal included

wording that granted immunity to “any potential co-conspirators” who were also involved in Epstein’s crimes. These accomplices or participants were not identified in the agreement, leaving it open to interpretation whether it possibly referred to other influential people who were having sex with underage girls at Epstein’s various homes or on his plane.

As part of the arrangement, Acosta agreed, despite a federal law to the contrary, that [the deal would be kept from the victims](#). As a result, the non-prosecution agreement was sealed until after it was approved by the judge, thereby averting any chance that the girls — or anyone else — might show up in court and try to derail it.

This is the story of how Epstein, bolstered by unlimited funds and represented by a powerhouse legal team, was able to manipulate the criminal justice system, and how his accusers, still traumatized by their pasts, believe they were betrayed by the very prosecutors who pledged to protect them.

“I don’t think anyone has been told the truth about what Jeffrey Epstein did,” said one of Epstein’s victims, Michelle Licata, now 30. “He ruined my life and a lot of girls’ lives. People need to know what he did and why he wasn’t prosecuted so it never happens again.”

Now President Trump’s secretary of labor, Acosta, 49, oversees a massive federal agency that provides oversight of the country’s labor laws, including human trafficking. He also has been on a list of possible replacements for former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who resigned under pressure earlier this month.

Acosta did not respond to numerous requests for an interview or answer queries through email.

Alexander Acosta, now President Donald Trump's secretary of labor, was the U.S. attorney for Southern Florida when he negotiated an end to the federal investigation of Jeffrey Epstein. Florida International University

But court records reveal details of the negotiations and the role that Acosta would play in arranging the deal, which scuttled the federal probe into a possible international sex trafficking operation. Among other things, Acosta allowed Epstein's lawyers unusual freedoms in dictating the terms of the non-prosecution agreement.

"The damage that happened in this case is unconscionable," said Bradley Edwards, a former state prosecutor who represents some of Epstein's victims. "How in the world, do you, the U.S. attorney, engage in a negotiation with a criminal defendant, basically allowing that criminal defendant to write up the agreement?"

As a result, neither the victims — nor even the judge — would know how many girls Epstein allegedly sexually abused between 2001 and 2005, when his underage sex activities were first uncovered by police. Police referred the case to the FBI a year later, when they began to suspect that their investigation was being undermined by the Palm Beach State Attorney's Office.

Not a 'he said, she said'

“This was not a ‘he said, she said’ situation. This was 50-something ‘shes’ and one ‘he’ — and the ‘shes’ all basically told the same story,” said retired Palm Beach Police Chief Michael Reiter, who supervised the police probe.

More than a decade later, at a time when Olympic gymnasts and Hollywood actresses have become a catalyst for a cultural reckoning about sexual abuse, Epstein’s victims have all but been forgotten.

The women — now in their late 20s and early 30s — are still fighting for an elusive justice that even the passage of time has not made right.

Like other victims of sexual abuse, they believe they’ve been silenced by a criminal justice system that stubbornly fails to hold Epstein and other wealthy and powerful men accountable.

“Jeffrey preyed on girls who were in a bad way, girls who were basically homeless. He went after girls who he thought no one would listen to and he was right,” said Courtney Wild, who was 14 when she met Epstein.

Courtney Wild, 31, was a victim of sex offender Jeffrey Epstein beginning at the age of 14. Epstein paid Wild, and many other underage girls, to give him massages, often having them undress and perform sexual acts. Epstein also used the girls as recruiters, paying them to bring him other underage girls.
Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

Over the past year, the Miami Herald examined a decade’s worth of court documents, lawsuits, witness depositions and newly

released FBI documents. Key people involved in the investigation — most of whom have never spoken before — were also interviewed. The Herald also obtained new records, including the full unredacted copy of the Palm Beach police investigation and witness statements that had been kept under seal.

The Herald learned that, as part of the plea deal, Epstein provided what the government called “valuable consideration” for unspecified information he supplied to federal investigators. While the documents obtained by the Herald don’t detail what the information was, Epstein’s sex crime case happened just as the country’s subprime mortgage market collapsed, ushering in the 2008 global financial crisis.

Records show that Epstein was a key federal witness in the criminal prosecution of two prominent executives with Bear Stearns, the global investment brokerage that failed in 2008, who were accused of corporate securities fraud. Epstein was one of the largest investors in the hedge fund managed by the executives, who were later acquitted. It is not known what role, if any, the case played in Epstein’s plea negotiations.

The Herald also identified about 80 women who say they were molested or otherwise sexually abused by Epstein from 2001 to 2006. About 60 of them were located — now scattered around the country and abroad. Eight of them agreed to be interviewed, on or off the record. Four of them were willing to speak on video.

The women are now mothers, wives, nurses, bartenders, Realtors, hairdressers and teachers. One is a Hollywood actress. Several have grappled with trauma, depression and addiction. Some have served time in prison.

A few did not survive. One young woman was found dead last year in a rundown motel in West Palm Beach. She overdosed on heroin and left behind a young son.

Support investigative journalism

The Miami Herald obtained thousands of FBI and court records, lawsuits, and witness depositions, and went to federal court in New York to access sealed documents in the reporting of "Perversion of Justice." The Herald also tracked down more than 60 women who said they were victims, some of whom had never spoken of the abuse before.

Your digital subscription, starting at \$0.99 for the first month, supports investigative journalism like this.

As part of Epstein's agreement, he was required to register as a sex offender, and pay restitution to the three dozen victims identified by the FBI. In many cases, the confidential financial settlements came only after Epstein's attorneys exposed every dark corner of their lives in a scorched-earth effort to portray the girls as gold diggers.

"You beat yourself up mentally and physically," said Jena-Lisa Jones, 30, who said Epstein molested her when she was 14. "You can't ever stop your thoughts. A word can trigger something. For me, it is the word 'pure' because he called me 'pure' in that room and then I remember what he did to me in that room."

Now, more than a decade later, two unrelated civil lawsuits — one set for trial on Dec. 4 — could reveal more about Epstein's crimes. The Dec. 4 case, in Palm Beach County state court, involves Epstein and Edwards, whom Epstein had accused of

legal misdeeds in representing several victims. The case is noteworthy because it will mark the first time that Epstein's victims will have their day in court, and several of them are scheduled to testify.

Jena-Lisa Jones, with her 18-month-old son, Raymond, says she was 14 when she was introduced to Jeffrey Epstein and was paid \$200 by him to give him a massage at his home. Jones says Epstein told her to take off all of her clothes and that he fondled her during the massage.

Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

A second lawsuit, known as the federal Crime Victims' Rights suit, is still pending in South Florida after a decade of legal jousting. It seeks to invalidate the non-prosecution agreement in hopes of sending Epstein to federal prison. Wild, who has never spoken publicly until now, is Jane Doe No. 1 in "Jane Doe No. 1 and Jane Doe No. 2 vs. the United States of America," a federal lawsuit that alleges Epstein's federal non-prosecution agreement was illegal.

Federal prosecutors, including Acosta, not only broke the law, the women contend in court documents, but they conspired with Epstein and his lawyers to circumvent public scrutiny and deceive his victims in violation of the Crime Victims' Rights Act. The law assigns victims a series of rights, including the right of notice of any court proceedings and the opportunity to appear at sentencing.

"As soon as that deal was signed, they silenced my voice and the voices of all of Jeffrey Epstein's other victims," said Wild, now 31.

“This case is about justice, not just for us, but for other victims who aren’t Olympic stars or Hollywood stars.”

In court papers, federal prosecutors have argued that they did not violate the Crime Victims’ Rights Act because no federal charges were ever filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, an argument that was later dismissed by the judge.

Duration 6:54

How a teen runaway became one of Jeffrey Epstein’s victims

Virginia Roberts was working at Mar-a-Lago when she was recruited to be a masseuse to Palm Beach hedge fund manager Jeffrey Epstein. She was lured into a life of depravity and sexual abuse.

By [Emily Michot](#) | [Julie K. Brown](#)

Despite substantial physical evidence and multiple witnesses backing up the girls’ stories, the secret deal allowed Epstein to enter guilty pleas to two felony prostitution charges. Epstein admitted to committing only one offense against one underage girl, who was labeled a prostitute, even though she was 14, which is well under the age of consent — 18 in Florida.

“She was taken advantage of twice — first by Epstein, and then by the criminal justice system that labeled a 14-year-old girl as a prostitute,” said Spencer Kivin, the lawyer who represented the girl.

“It’s just outrageous how they minimized his crimes and devalued his victims by calling them prostitutes,” said Yasmin Vafa, a human rights attorney and executive director of Rights4Girls, which is working to end the sexual exploitation of girls and young women.

“There is no such thing as a child prostitute. Under federal law, it’s called child sex trafficking — whether Epstein pimped them out to others or not. It’s still a commercial sex act — and he could have been jailed for the rest of his life under federal law,” she said.

It would be easy to dismiss the Epstein case as another example of how there are two systems of justice in America, one for the rich and one for the poor. But a thorough analysis of the case tells a far more troubling story.

A close look at the trove of letters and emails contained in court records provides a window into the plea negotiations, revealing an unusual level of collaboration between federal prosecutors and Epstein’s legal team that even government lawyers, in recent court documents, admitted was unorthodox.

Acosta, in 2011, would explain that he was unduly pressured by Epstein’s heavy-hitting lawyers — Lefkowitz, Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz, Jack Goldberger, Roy Black, former U.S. Attorney Guy Lewis, Gerald Lefcourt, and Kenneth Starr, the

former Whitewater special prosecutor who investigated Bill Clinton's sexual liaisons with Monica Lewinsky.

'Avoid the press' plan

That included keeping the deal from Epstein's victims, emails show.

"Thank you for the commitment you made to me during our Oct. 12 meeting," Lefkowitz wrote in a letter to Acosta after their breakfast meeting in West Palm Beach. He added that he was hopeful that Acosta would abide by a promise to keep the deal confidential.

"You ... assured me that your office would not ... contact any of the identified individuals, potential witnesses or potential civil claimants and the respective counsel in this matter," Lefkowitz wrote.

In email after email, Acosta and the lead federal prosecutor, A. Marie Villafaña, acquiesced to Epstein's legal team's demands, which often focused on ways to limit the scandal by shutting out his victims and the media, including suggesting that the charges be filed in Miami, instead of Palm Beach, where Epstein's victims lived.

"On an 'avoid the press' note ... I can file the charge in district court in Miami which will hopefully cut the press coverage significantly. Do you want to check that out?" Villafaña wrote to Lefkowitz in a September 2007 email.

Federal prosecutors identified 36 underage victims, but none of those victims appeared at his sentencing on June 30, 2008, in

state court in Palm Beach County. Most of them heard about it on the news — and even then they didn't understand what had happened to the federal probe that they'd been assured was ongoing.

Edwards filed an emergency motion in federal court to block the non-prosecution agreement, but by the time the agreement was unsealed — over a year later — Epstein had already served his sentence and been released from jail.

Attorney Bradley Edwards is representing several young women who say they were sexually abused as minors by Palm Beach multimillionaire Jeffrey Epstein. Edwards' Fort Lauderdale law office is packed with files relating to the Epstein case.
Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

"The conspiracy between the government and Epstein was really 'let's figure out a way to make the whole thing go away as quietly as possible,' " said Edwards, who represents Wild and Jane Doe No. 2, who declined to comment for this story.

"In never consulting with the victims, and keeping it secret, it showed that someone with money can buy his way out of anything."

It was far from the last time Epstein would receive VIP handling. Unlike other convicted sex offenders, Epstein didn't face the kind of rough justice that child sex offenders do in Florida state prisons. Instead of being sent to state prison, Epstein was housed in a private wing of the Palm Beach County jail. And rather than having him sit in a cell most of the day, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office allowed Epstein work release

privileges, which enabled him to leave the jail six days a week, for 12 hours a day, to go to a comfortable office that Epstein had set up in West Palm Beach. This was granted despite explicit sheriff's department rules stating that sex offenders don't qualify for work release.

Jeffrey Epstein, accused of sexually abusing dozens of underage women, grins for his mugshot on Florida's sex offender registry. He once compared his crimes to 'stealing a bagel.'

Florida sex offender registry

The sheriff, Ric Bradshaw, would not answer questions, submitted by the Miami Herald, about Epstein's work release.

Neither Epstein nor his lead attorney, Jack Goldberger, responded to multiple requests for comment for this story. During depositions taken as part of two dozen lawsuits filed against him by his victims, Epstein has invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, in one instance doing so more than 200 times.

In the past, his lawyers have said that the girls lied about their ages, that their stories were exaggerated or untrue and that they were unreliable witnesses prone to drug use.

In 2011, Epstein petitioned to have his sex offender status reduced in New York, where he has a home and is required to register every 90 days. In New York, he is classified as a level 3 offender — the highest safety risk because of his likelihood to re-offend.

A prosecutor under New York County District Attorney Cyrus Vance argued on Epstein's behalf, telling New York Supreme Court Judge Ruth Pickholtz that the Florida case never led to an indictment and that his underage victims failed to cooperate in the case. Pickholtz, however, denied the petition, expressing astonishment that a New York prosecutor would make such a request on behalf of a serial sex offender accused of molesting so many girls.

"I have to tell you, I'm a little overwhelmed because I have never seen a prosecutor's office do anything like this. I have done so many [sex offender registration hearings] much less troubling than this one where the [prosecutor] would never make a downward argument like this," she said.

The house on El Brillo

The women who went to Jeffrey Epstein's mansion as girls tend to divide their lives into two parts: life before Jeffrey and life after Jeffrey.

Before she met Epstein, Courtney Wild was captain of the cheerleading squad, first trumpet in the band and an A-student at Lake Worth Middle School.

After she met Epstein, she was a stripper, a drug addict and an inmate at Gadsden Correctional Institution in Florida's Panhandle.

Wild still had braces on her teeth when she was introduced to him in 2002 at the age of 14.

She was fair, petite and slender, blonde and blue-eyed. Wild, who later helped recruit other girls, said Epstein preferred girls who were white, appeared prepubescent and those who were easy to manipulate into going further each time.

“By the time I was 16, I had probably brought him 70 to 80 girls who were all 14 and 15 years old. He was involved in my life for years,” said Wild, who was released from prison in October after serving three years on drug charges.

The girls — mostly 13 to 16 — were lured to his pink waterfront mansion by Wild and other girls, who went to malls, house parties and other places where girls congregated, and told recruits that they could earn \$200 to \$300 to give a man — Epstein — a massage, according to an unredacted copy of the Palm Beach police investigation obtained by the Herald.

The lead Palm Beach police detective on the case, Joseph Recarey, said Epstein’s operation worked like a sexual pyramid scheme.

Joseph Recarey, the former Palm Beach police detective who led the investigation into Jeffrey Epstein, said the millionaire’s solicitation of sex with underage girls resembled a pyramid scheme. Its unraveling was similar, with one victim leading to two others, each of whom led to others, and so on.

Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

“The common interview with a girl went like this: ‘I was brought there by so and so. I didn’t feel comfortable with what happened, but I got paid well, so I was told if I didn’t feel comfortable, I could bring someone else and still get paid,’ ” Recarey said.

During the massage sessions, Recarey said Epstein would molest the girls, paying them premiums for engaging in oral sex and intercourse, and offering them a further bounty to find him more girls.

Recarey, in his first interview about the case, said the evidence the department collected to support the girls' stories was overwhelming, including phone call records, copies of written phone messages from the girls found in Epstein's trash and Epstein's flight logs, which showed his private plane in Palm Beach on the days the girls were scheduled to give him massages.

Epstein could be a generous benefactor, Recarey said, buying his favored girls gifts. He might rent a car for a young girl to make it more convenient for her to stop by and cater to him. Once, he sent a bucket of roses to the local high school after one of his girls starred in a stage production. The floral-delivery instructions and a report card for one of the girls were discovered in a search of his mansion and trash. Police also obtained receipts for the rental cars and gifts, Recarey said.

Epstein counseled the girls about their schooling, and told them he would help them get into college, modeling school, fashion design or acting. At least two of Epstein's victims told police that they were in love with him, according to the police report.

The police report shows how uncannily consistent the girls' stories were — right down to their detailed descriptions of Epstein's genitalia.

"We had victims who didn't know each other, never met each other and they all basically independently told the same story,"

said Reiter, the retired Palm Beach police chief.

Michael Reiter is the former chief of police in the Town of Palm Beach, and was the chief during the investigation of Jeffrey Epstein. He says the young women lured to Epstein's mansion didn't necessarily know each other but they told nearly identical stories.

Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

Reiter, also speaking for the first time, said detectives were astonished by the sheer volume of young girls coming and going from his house, the frequency — sometimes several in the same day — and the young ages of the girls.

"It started out to give a man a back rub, but in many cases it turned into something far worse than that, elevated to a serious crime, in some cases sexual batteries," he said.

Most of the girls said they arrived by car or taxi, and entered the side door, where they were led into a kitchen by a female staff assistant named Sarah Kellen, the report said. A chef might prepare them a meal or offer them cereal. The girls — most from local schools — would then ascend a staircase off the kitchen, up to a large master bedroom and bath.

They were met by Epstein, clad in a towel. He would select a lotion from an array lined up on a table, then lie facedown on a massage table, instruct the girl to strip partially or fully, and direct them to massage his feet and backside. Then he would turn over and have them massage his chest, often instructing them to pinch his nipples, while he masturbated, according to the police report.

At times, if emboldened, he would try to penetrate them with his fingers or use a vibrator on them. He would go as far as the girls were willing to let him, including intercourse, according to police documents. Sometimes he would instruct a young woman he described as his Yugoslavian sex slave, Nadia Marcinkova, who was over 18, to join in, the girls told Recarey. Epstein often took photographs of the girls having sex and displayed them around the house, the detective said.

Once sexually gratified, Epstein would take a shower in his massive bathroom, which the girls described as having a large shower and a hot pink and mint green sofa.

Kellen (now Vickers) and Marcinkova, through their attorneys, declined to comment for this story.

Never enough

One girl told police that she was approached by an Epstein recruiter when she was 16, and was working at the Wellington mall. Over the course of more than a year, she went to Epstein's house hundreds of times, she said. The girl tearfully told Recarey that she often had sex with Marcinkova — who employed strap-on dildos and other toys — while Epstein watched and choreographed her moves to please himself, according to the police report. Often times, she said, she was so sore after the encounters that she could barely walk, the police report said.

But she said she was firm about not wanting to have intercourse with Epstein. One day, however, the girl said that Epstein, unable to control himself, held her down on a massage table and penetrated her, the police report said. The girl, who was 16 or 17

at the time, said that Epstein apologized and paid her \$1,000, the police report said.

Most of the girls came from disadvantaged families, single-parent homes or foster care. Some had experienced troubles that belied their ages: They had parents and friends who committed suicide; mothers abused by husbands and boyfriends; fathers who molested and beat them. One girl had watched her stepfather strangle her 8-year-old stepbrother, according to court records obtained by the Herald.

Many of the girls were one step away from homelessness.

“We were stupid, poor children,” said one woman, who did not want to be named because she never told anyone about Epstein. At the time, she recalled that she was 14 and a high school freshman.

“We just wanted money for school clothes, for shoes. I remember wearing shoes too tight for three years in a row. We had no family and no guidance, and we were told that we were going to just have to sit in a room topless and he was going to just look at us. It sounded so simple, and was going to be easy money for just sitting there.”

Duration 5:40

Where are they now? The biggest players in the Jeffrey Epstein case

The girls who were abused by Jeffrey Epstein and the cops who championed their cause remain angry over what they regard as a gross injustice, while Epstein's employees and those who engineered his non-prosecution agreement have prospered.

By [Marta Oliver Craviotto](#) | [Emily Michot](#) | [Julie K. Brown](#)

The woman, who went to Epstein's home multiple times, said Epstein didn't like her because her breasts were too big. The last time she went, she said, one girl came out crying and they were instructed to leave the house and had to pay for their own cab home.

Some girls told police they were coached by their peer recruiters to lie to Epstein about their ages and say they were 18. Epstein's legal team would later claim that even if the girls were under 18, there was no way he could have known. However, under Florida law, ignorance of a sex partner's age is not a defense for having sex with a minor.

Wild, who worked for Epstein until she was 21, said he was well aware of their tender ages — because he demanded they be young.

"He told me he wanted them as young as I could find them," she said, explaining that as she grew older and had less access to young girls, Epstein got increasingly angry with her inability to find him the young girls he desired.

“If I had a girl to bring him at breakfast, lunch and dinner, then that’s how many times I would go a day. He wanted as many girls as I could get him. It was never enough.”

The pyramid crumbles

Epstein’s scheme first began to unravel in March 2005, when the parents of a 14-year-old girl told Palm Beach police that she had been molested by Epstein at his mansion. The girl reluctantly confessed that she had been brought there by two other girls, and those girls pointed to two more girls who had been there.

By the time detectives tracked down one victim, there were two and three more to find. Soon there were dozens.

Jeffrey Epstein’s current private plane, painted a distinctive blue, is parked at an executive hub at Palm Beach International Airport on Thursday morning, May 24, 2018. It is how he shuttles between his homes in the Town of Palm Beach, New York City, New Mexico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. During the decade when, police say, he sexually abused dozens of underage girls, he used a different plane, which tabloids nicknamed ‘The Lolita Express.’

Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

“We didn’t know where the victims would ever end,” Reiter said.

Eventually, the girls told them about still other girls and young women they had seen at Epstein’s house, many of whom didn’t speak English, Recarey said. That led Recarey to suspect that Epstein’s exploits weren’t just confined to Palm Beach. Police obtained the flight logs for his private plane, and found female

names and initials among the list of people who flew on the aircraft — including the names of some famous and powerful people who had also been passengers, Recarey said.

A newly released FBI report, posted on the bureau's website as a result of the Herald's Freedom of Information Act request, shows that at the time the non-prosecution deal was executed, the FBI was interviewing witnesses and victims "from across the United States." The probe stretched from Florida to New York and New Mexico, records show.

Indeed, one lawsuit, still pending in New York, alleges that Epstein used an international modeling agency to recruit girls as young as 13 from Europe, Ecuador and Brazil. The girls lived in a New York building owned by Epstein, who paid for their visas, according to the sworn statement of Maritza Vasquez, the one-time bookkeeper for Mc2, the modeling agency.

Mike Fisten, a former Miami-Dade police sergeant who was also a homicide investigator and a member of the FBI Organized Crime Task Force, said the FBI had enough evidence to put Epstein away for a long time but was overruled by Acosta. Some of the agents involved in the case were disappointed by Acosta's bowing to pressure from Epstein's lawyers, he said.

Mike Fisten, a former Miami-Dade police sergeant and homicide detective who is now a private investigator with Bradley Edwards, attorney for some of Jeffrey Epstein's victims, says the punishment Epstein received was a 'joke.'
Emily Michot emichot@miamiherald.com

“The day that a sitting U.S. attorney is afraid of a lawyer or afraid of a defendant is a very sad day in this country,” said Fisten, now a private investigator for Edwards.

Suit/countersuit

Now, a complex web of litigation could reveal more about Epstein’s crimes. A lawsuit, set for trial Dec. 4 in Palm Beach County, involves the notorious convicted Ponzi schemer Scott Rothstein, in whose law firm Edwards once worked.

In 2009, Epstein sued Edwards, alleging that Edwards was involved with Rothstein and was using the girls’ civil lawsuits to perpetuate Rothstein’s massive Ponzi operation. But Rothstein said Edwards didn’t know about the scheme, and Epstein dropped the lawsuit.

Edwards countersued for malicious prosecution, arguing that Epstein sued him to retaliate for his aggressive representation of Epstein’s victims.

Several women who went to Epstein’s home as underage girls are scheduled to testify against him for the first time.

Florida state Sen. Lauren Book, a child sex abuse survivor who has lobbied for tough sex offender laws, said Epstein’s case should serve as a tipping point for criminal cases involving sex crimes against children.

“Where is the righteous indignation for these women? Where are the protectors? Who is banging down the doors of the secretary of labor, or the judge or the sheriff’s office in Palm Beach County,

demanding justice and demanding the right to be heard?" Book asked.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Villafaña, in court papers, said that prosecutors used their "best efforts" to comply with the Crime Victims' Rights Act, but exercised their "prosecutorial discretion" when they chose not to notify the victims. The reasoning went like this: The non-prosecution deal had a restitution clause that provided the girls a chance to seek compensation from Epstein. Had the deal fallen through, necessitating a trial, Epstein's lawyers might have used the prior restitution clause to undermine the girls' credibility as witnesses, by claiming they had exaggerated Epstein's behavior in hopes of cashing in.

Acosta has never fully explained why he felt it was in the best interests of the underage girls — and their parents — for him to keep the agreement sealed. Or why the FBI investigation was closed even as, recently released documents show, the case was yielding more victims and evidence of a possible sex-trafficking conspiracy beyond Palm Beach.

Upon his nomination by Trump as labor secretary in 2017, Acosta was questioned about the Epstein case during a Senate confirmation hearing.

"At the end of the day, based on the evidence, professionals within a prosecutor's office decided that a plea that guarantees someone goes to jail, that guarantees he register [as a sex offender] generally and guarantees other outcomes, is a good thing," Acosta said of his decision to not prosecute Epstein federally.

California Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, in opposing Acosta for labor secretary, noted that “his handling of a case involving sex trafficking of underage girls when he was a U.S. attorney suggests he won’t put the interests of workers and everyday people ahead of the powerful and well-connected.”

Marci Hamilton, a University of Pennsylvania law professor who is one of the nation’s leading advocates for reforming laws involving sex crimes against children, said what Acosta and other prosecutors did is similar to what the Catholic Church did to protect pedophile priests.

“The real crime with the Catholic priests was the way they covered it up and shielded the priests,” Hamilton said. “The orchestration of power by men only is protected as long as everybody agrees to keep it secret. This is a story the world needs to hear.”