

CNN Politics

Why some of Jeffrey Epstein's victims are wary of compiling their own 'client list'

By



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Lisa Phillips speaks during a news conference with fellow alleged victims of Jeffrey Epstein outside the US Capitol on September 3.

Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

Lisa Phillips, who says she was in her early 20s when she first met Jeffrey Epstein and endured years of abuse from the late-financier and others in his vast network, stood in front of the steps of the US Capitol in early September. Flanked by other Epstein survivors, high-powered lawyers and a handful of members of Congress, Phillips ended her brief remarks [with an announcement](#).

“Us Epstein survivors have been discussing creating our own list. We know the names. Many of us were abused by them. Now, together as survivors, we will confidentially compile the names we all know who were regularly in the Epstein world,” she said. “And it will be done by survivors and for survivors. No one else is involved. Stay tuned for more details.”

Her words were met with applause and cheers of “You got it!” from the crowd, capping off what had already been a dramatic day: A rare gathering of Epstein’s victims in Washington aimed at shining a spotlight on the federal government’s refusal to release more information about the convicted sex offender’s crimes, including the identities of those who had enabled him.

But nearly a month after that press conference, there does not appear to be a coordinated effort by the survivors to compile such a list. CNN spoke with numerous Epstein survivors, lawyers representing dozens of victims and congressional staff familiar with Epstein-related investigations on Capitol Hill. All of them said they had not been contacted about — and were unaware of — any organized effort by the survivors to create such a list.

Such an undertaking, some of them said, would put Epstein’s already vulnerable victims in greater danger. Publicly accusing Epstein’s powerful friends and accomplices of wrongdoing would open the victims up to a stream of physical and legal threats, they warned. But the pressure to produce such a list — whether by the victims or the government — has only been growing, amid a bipartisan push for more transparency.

Annie Farmer, an Epstein victim who has testified that she was recruited and sexually assaulted by his co-conspirator Ghislaine Maxwell as a teenager, told CNN that the announcement at the press conference last month triggered frustration among some of the survivors. Particularly given that Epstein survivors “have had to already risk so much individually to come and speak about this,” Farmer said she does not believe it should be up to them to now compile — let alone publicly release — the names of those who may have been involved in Epstein’s abuse.

“That was a big headline grabber. It almost felt like immediately, then, people were like: ‘Okay, well, you guys just do it. You release the list.’ It’s like, wait. No, no, no. But that’s not it,” she said. “In my mind, that’s not the most effective way of us moving forward as a group.”



This undated trial evidence image obtained December 8, 2021, from the US District Court for the Southern District of New York shows Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein in Queen's log cabin at Balmoral.

US District Court for the Southern District of New York

Building expectations

The Justice Department announced in July that investigators have found no evidence of a so-called client list, and that it would not release any new documents related to Epstein. The revelation prompted a criticism not only from Epstein's victims, but also from many of President Donald Trump's MAGA supporters who had been counting on the Trump administration to release a trove of new information about Epstein's wrongdoings.

Those expectations had been fueled in no small part by [Trump's own attorney general, Pam Bondi](#), who said in February that an Epstein client list was "sitting on my desk." The administration then clarified that she had been referring more generally to investigative files.

While the House Oversight Committee has released tens of thousands of pages of Epstein documents that it has received from the Justice Department, it has not quelled the criticism. "There is no mention of any client list or anything that improves transparency or

justice for victims,” Democratic Rep. Robert Garcia, the committee’s top Democrat, said last month after [the panel’s release](#) of additional Epstein records, alleging that the majority of what was unveiled was already public. Much of the information released so far has also been redacted to protect the privacy of the victims.

That backdrop has helped fuel interest in – and support for – the idea of survivors compiling their own list of Epstein accomplices, which critics argue the government has so far failed to do.

Liz Stein, [another Epstein survivor](#), emphasized that she didn’t believe Phillips intended to harm or mislead anyone by floating the idea of survivors creating their own list. Still, she said she similarly worries that the notion has put the victims in a “precarious” position.

“We’re seeing a lot of pressure put on to us directly for things like, for us to release names, and for us to expose these people. But I don’t think that anyone understands the risks to us in doing that,” Stein said.

“We’re being asked by every journalist about that question. It is not our job.”

Jennifer Freeman, a lawyer representing victims who have accused Maxwell of abuse, including Farmer’s sister Maria, said she was also unaware of any ongoing efforts by Epstein survivors to put together a list of their own, and that she believes doing so would be “dangerous.”

“It puts them at risk and puts the burden of action on them, when it should be the government and institutions that are sworn to protect us,” Freeman said.



Lisa Phillips during a press conference at the US Capitol on September 3.

Bryan Dozier/Middle East Images/AFP/Getty Images

Survivors weigh next steps

In an interview with CNN, Phillips said that her intent at the press conference was to send a message of support to any Epstein survivor who might be listening — particularly those who have been too fearful to speak out. She also said she understands and shares in the concern expressed by other survivors and lawyers who say it would be dangerous for the Epstein victims to compile and release their own list of names.

“Survivors making a list, and just putting a list out there, which is read by us, is very dangerous,” Phillips said.

As for the status of such an effort, Phillips said she had heard from many survivors of various kinds of abuse since the press conference and is currently thinking through next steps. “What is the right way to go about it? The legal way? The most protective way for all of us?” she said. On whether any physical list already exists, she said the attorneys who represent Epstein victims have a running list of people who were a part of the Epstein network.

Attorney Brad Edwards, who has represented numerous Epstein victims over the years, was one of the lawyers present at the Capitol Hill press conference last month. He said at the time that a group of attorneys had previously “created somewhat of a list.” Edwards did not respond to a request for comment for this story.

Additional lawyers who have represented dozens of Epstein victims, including Spencer Kuvin and Gloria Allred, told CNN that they have not been approached about their clients helping to put together their own list.

Some lawyers and survivors also worry the focus on a “client list” risks minimizing the role of others associates in Epstein’s vast network who may not have sexually or physically abused the victims themselves but still helped to finance and enable Epstein’s criminal enterprise.



A traffic barrier glows red near the US Capitol on Monday.

Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Anticipation on the Hill

On Capitol Hill, there is currently an effort underway to force a House vote on a bill to require the Justice Department to release Epstein-related materials. While the discharge

petition to bring the legislation to the House floor is mostly backed by House Democrats, it also has the notable support of several Republicans, including staunch Trump supporters like Reps. Lauren Boebert and Nancy Mace.

The petition is short of one signature to reach the 218 that are required, and Democrat Adelita Grijalva, recently elected in Arizona in a special election, is expected to provide that last signature when she is sworn into office.

Some lawmakers have also publicly supported the idea of Epstein survivors making their own list.

Republican Rep. James Comer, the chairman of the House Oversight Committee which is probing the federal government's handling of Epstein and Maxwell, [said](#) in the aftermath of the September press conference that his panel would "compile a list from the victims." A spokesperson for Comer told CNN that the panel has remained in touch with survivors' attorneys in the weeks since, and that the chairman is still ready to receive any information about Epstein's crimes. But the aide added of the Epstein victims: "They have not provided names at this time."

Sara Guerrero, a spokesperson for Rep. Garcia, the committee's top Democrat, separately told CNN: "We are continuing to speak to victims and their attorneys and have nothing new in terms of a formal list at this time."

Kuvin, a Florida-based lawyer whose Epstein-related clients have all remained anonymous, said while he has not been asked whether his clients would contribute to a survivors-created Epstein list, he is prepared to offer the following advice in such a scenario: "Be careful."

"Because these men that they may name have a lot of money and resources behind them to be able to potentially litigate against them and sue them and cause all kinds of problems and issues," Kuvin said. "This should not be something that the victims have to do. This should be something that the federal government does because it's right and because it stands for justice for these victims."