

A SpaceX flight attendant said Elon Musk exposed himself and propositioned her for sex, documents show. The company paid \$250,000 for her silence.

Rich McHugh

Andrew Kelly/Reuters

- **A flight attendant for SpaceX said Elon Musk asked her to "do more" during a massage, documents show.**
 - **The billionaire founder exposed his penis to her and offered to buy her a horse, according to claims in a declaration.**
 - **After she reported the incident to SpaceX, Musk's company paid her \$250,000 as part of a severance agreement.**
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SpaceX, the aerospace firm founded by Elon Musk, the world's wealthiest man, paid a flight attendant \$250,000 to settle a sexual misconduct claim against Musk in 2018, Insider has learned.

The attendant worked as a member of the cabin crew on a contract basis for SpaceX's corporate jet fleet. She accused Musk of exposing his erect penis to her, rubbing her leg without consent, and offering to buy her a horse in exchange for an erotic massage, according to interviews and documents obtained by Insider.

The incident, which took place in 2016, is alleged in a declaration signed by a friend of the attendant and prepared in support of her claim. The details in this story are drawn from the declaration as well as other documents, including email correspondence and other records shared with Insider by the friend. According to the declaration, the attendant confided to the friend that after taking the flight attendant job, she was encouraged to get licensed as a masseuse so that she could give Musk massages. It was during one such massage in a private cabin on Musk's Gulfstream G650ER, she told the friend, that Musk propositioned her.

After Insider contacted Musk for comment, he emailed to ask for more time to respond and said there is "a lot more to this story."

"If I were inclined to engage in sexual harassment, this is unlikely to be the first time in my entire 30-year career that it comes to light," he wrote, calling the story a "politically motivated hit piece." Insider extended the deadline and reiterated the offer to Musk to comment on the claims. He did not respond.

Reached via cell phone, SpaceX vice president of legal Christopher Cardaci said, "I'm not going to comment on any settlement agreements." SpaceX did not respond to requests for comment to its general media contact email address.

An allegation that Musk offered a horse in exchange for an erotic massage

The flight attendant told her friend that the billionaire SpaceX and Tesla founder asked her to come to his room during a flight in late 2016 "for a full body massage," the declaration says. When she arrived, the attendant found that Musk "was completely naked except for a sheet covering the lower half of his body." During the massage, the declaration says, Musk "exposed his genitals" and then "touched her and offered to buy her a horse if she would 'do more,' referring to the performance of sex acts." The attendant, who rides horses, declined and continued with the massage without engaging in any sexual conduct. The attendant "is not for sale," the friend's declaration said. "She is not going to perform sexual favors for money or gifts." The incident occurred during a flight to London.

In an interview with Insider, the friend described the attendant's allegations in more detail. She spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing fears for her personal safety, but Insider is aware of her identity. Insider is also aware of the flight attendant's identity, but is not naming her because she has claimed to be a victim of sexual misconduct. She declined to comment for this story.

"He whipped out his penis, it was erect," the friend said, describing the allegations. "And he started propositioning her, like he touched her thigh and told her he would buy her a horse. And he basically tried to bribe her to perform some sort of sexual favor."

"Punished for refusing to prostitute herself"

The friend said that the attendant told her about the misconduct while they were on a hike together shortly after the London trip. The friend described the attendant as distraught and visibly shaken. "She was really upset," the friend said. "She didn't know what to do."

The flight attendant told her friend that work began to dry up after she refused Musk's advances. "Before the incident, she regarded Mr. Musk as a person to look up to," the declaration says. "But after he exposed himself, touched her without permission, and offered to pay her for sex, she was full of anxiety."

"She figured things could just go back to normal and she would pretend like nothing happened," the friend told Insider. "However, she started to feel as if she was receiving some sort of retaliation where her shifts were cut back, and she was starting to feel really stressed." Eventually, the declaration says, the attendant felt "she was being pushed out and punished for refusing to prostitute herself."

Massages on demand

SpaceX places a special emphasis on massages, going so far as to employ in-house massage therapists as a [perk for executives](#). According to the friend, the flight attendant was encouraged by her superiors to purchase her own professional massage training for her sessions with Musk.

"They encouraged her to get licensed as a masseuse, but on her own time, on her own dime," the friend said. "They implied that she would get to fly more often if she were to do this because she'd be able to give Elon proper massages. I thought that was kind of strange because — you weren't hired to be a masseuse. You were hired to be a flight attendant. And if Elon likes massages, then he should be paying for you to go to masseuse school. But she was just so happy and eager to have the job and be able to travel."

A \$250,000 severance payment

In 2018, after becoming convinced that her refusal to accept Musk's proposal had diminished her opportunities at SpaceX, the attendant hired a California employment lawyer and sent a complaint to the company's human resources department detailing the episode. Around that time, the attorney's firm contacted the friend and asked her to prepare the declaration corroborating the claims.

The attendant's complaint was resolved quickly after a session with a mediator that Musk personally attended. The matter never reached a court of law or an arbitration proceeding. In November 2018, Musk, SpaceX and the flight attendant entered into a severance agreement granting the attendant a \$250,000 payment in exchange for a promise not to sue over the claims.

The agreement also included restrictive non-disclosure and non-disparagement clauses that bar the attendant from ever discussing the severance payment or disclosing any information of any kind about Musk and his businesses, including SpaceX and Tesla.

Musk is currently engaged in a bid to purchase Twitter driven by his professed belief that "free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy." Earlier this month, he wrote on Twitter that "sunlight is the best disinfectant."

Twitter did not respond to a request for comment.

"When you choose to remain silent, you become part of that system"

The friend told Insider that she decided to come forward without consulting the flight attendant because, as a survivor of sexual assault, she felt an obligation to share what she has been told about Musk. Unlike the flight attendant, her friend is not bound by any non-disclosure agreement.

"I absolutely felt a responsibility to come forward with it, especially now," she said. "He is the richest man in the world. Someone with that level of power causing that kind of harm and then throwing some money at the situation, that's not accountability. There are predators all over the world. But when someone is particularly wealthy and powerful, they literally have systems that are like a machine working for them, to set them up to be able to do whatever they want."

Remaining silent, the friend said, would make her complicit. "When you choose to remain silent, yeah, you do become a part of that system," she said. "You do become a part of that machine that allows someone like Elon Musk to continue to do the horrible things that he's done."

Non-disclosure agreements are crucial components of that machine. The friend said that before she reached out to Insider, she called the attorney who represented the victim. The attorney told her that, although she was free to speak to the press, sharing any documents from the case — including her own declaration — could put the flight attendant at risk.

"Her primary concern was clearly her client," the friend said. She recalled the attorney saying that confidentiality provisions are "bullshit" and that if any other women have been victimized by Musk, they ought to come forward. But when it came to her client, the attorney urged the friend not to share the declaration. "That would be a massive problem," she told the friend.

California, where SpaceX is headquartered, no longer permits companies to require non-disclosure clauses in agreements like the one the attendant signed. Just months after her settlement in 2018, then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law the "Stand Against Non-Disclosure Act," which bars the use of NDAs going forward in settlements involving sexual harassment, discrimination, or assault unless they are requested by the plaintiff.

The attorney did not respond to requests for comment.

"If there were a way for [her] to come forward without putting herself at risk, without jeopardizing her life in any way, I believe she would," the friend of the attendant told Insider. "I hope she feels like I did the right thing. I hope she feels I said the things that she didn't feel safe enough to say."

"I would like for the truth to be revealed"

This is the only known allegation and settlement for sexual misconduct tied personally to Musk. Two of his companies, however, have faced allegations of sexual harassment in the past. In December 2021, the same week he was named Time's Person of the Year, four women who worked at SpaceX spoke out about sexual harassment they said they faced at the company, where Musk is the CEO. One, Ashley Kosak, published an essay recounting being groped and touched inappropriately by male employees while she was an intern. Three others — one of whom said she was bound by a non-disclosure agreement — [recounted similar treatment](#) to the New York Times.

In response to the reports, SpaceX president and chief operating officer Gwynne Shotwell sent a company-wide email saying that "timely reporting of harassment is key to our maintaining SpaceX as a great place to work; we can't fix what we don't know," the Times reported. She added that SpaceX will "rigorously investigate all harassment or discrimination claims and take rapid and appropriate action when we find our policy is violated."

And at least [six women have sued Tesla](#), where Musk is the CEO, alleging sexual harassment at a Tesla factory. Men at the factory ogled women and remarked on their clothes, the complaints said, leading some women to wear baggy outfits and use stacks of boxes to obstruct the views of leering co-workers. Some of the women claimed they were retaliated against when they came forward.

The friend told Insider that if anyone else was mistreated by Musk, she hopes they will publicly tell their story. If there are other victims, she said, "I would like for them to come forward. I would like for the truth to be revealed."