

# Bethenny Frankel Enlists Power Attorneys Bryan Freedman and Mark Geragos in Fight for Reality Star Protections: 'This Is Going to Be a War' (EXCLUSIVE)

By Marc Malkin



Getty Images

Bethenny Frankel has enlisted two of the most high-profile attorneys in Hollywood to help in her self-proclaimed fight to help protect reality stars from what she says is exploitation by networks and studios.

Power players Bryan Freedman and Mark Geragos are now working alongside Frankel to investigate the treatment of reality stars.

Freedman tells me that he has heard from roughly 50 reality show cast members from various docuseries and competition shows who believe that they were "used and unfairly" treated by television networks and streamers.

"Something has to change because the current system is broken," Geragos says.

Frankel's quest comes amid the writers and actors strike that has effectively shut down Hollywood. Reality TV can still be produced during the double strike, and most networks will be heavily relying on unscripted programming this fall. But Frankel — one of the most prominent personalities to come from Bravo's "Real Housewives" franchise — has taken a stance that reality stars should unionize to fight for their rights, as well.

"Just because you can exploit young, doe-eyed talent desperate for the platform TV gives them, it doesn't mean you should," Frankel previously said. "They don't know what they don't know. I was playing chess, but how do I help the people who may not know the game?"

Frankel first began speaking out on social media amid the strikes. But now, with the support of two prominent attorneys, she's hoping her fight to protect lesser-known reality stars may prove to be the beginning of a game-changing movement in Hollywood.

"I think this is going to be just the start of the truth telling about what's really going on," Freedman says. "I've met with a lot of people who told me a lot of stories. This is going to end up being a war and I'm going to lead the war."

Freedman has been on the frontlines of some of the most headline-making Hollywood talent battles in recent memory. He is currently representing Vanna White in her fight against Sony for a higher salary on "Wheel of Fortune." He negotiated longtime "The Bachelor" host Chris Harrison's payout when he exited the ABC dating show after coming under fire for defending a contestant's past racist behavior, and he won an undisclosed settlement in 2020 for Gabrielle Union after she alleged rampant workplace toxicity when she was a judge on NBC's "America's Got Talent." He famously won Megyn Kelly's \$69 million payout from NBC News, and he's currently working with the recently-terminated Tucker Carlson and Don Lemon, after they were fired by Fox News and CNN, respectively.

Geragos' long list of celebrity clients include the late Michael Jackson, who he represented in the early days of the singer's molestation case. He defended Winona Ryder in 2002 when she was charged with stealing more than \$5,500 worth of merchandise from Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills. In 2017, he helped Colin Kaepernick reach a confidential agreement after the football star alleged the NFL tried to keep him from playing when he chose to take a knee during the national anthem. Geragos says that he has handled several reality show-based cases that were settled before going to court.

"I'm collecting stories that violate OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] standards, that violate workplace safety regulations," Freedman said. "There is case law out there on some of this fraudulent stuff and waiving future harm."

"It's no different than other grievances that are going on right now like when you look at the actors and writers strikes," Geragos says. "They sign one thing but they didn't sign on for everything else they're being exploited for."

Freedman notes that reality stars often sign unfair and low-paid contracts, in exchange for the opportunity to be on TV. But he says these individuals should not be stuck in a corner. "You're giving up your rights for no money or for \$900 so you can be on a show? You're going to give up your rights to someone that intentionally harms you?" he says "I don't think that's allowed under the law."

When asked what next steps are, Freedman and Geragos acknowledge they are in the early stages of compiling testimony, contracts and agreements. Freedman says their discovery may result in a class-action suit or a multi-plaintiff claim. "Or maybe you get 40 people who are disenfranchised in some way and you have a press conference about it," he says, signaling that more attention will be called to this matter in the near future.

"Something has to happen because the current system is broken," Geragos says. "I'm not a betting man but if I had to prognosticate, I think this will end up in the courts."

Frankel previously spoke to *Variety* exclusively about her call to unionize reality stars after being inspired by the [SAG-AFTRA and WGA strikes](#). She is using her voice to demand some sort of regulations and standards to be put in place for the reality space, including minimum compensation as well as residual payments.

"I know I'm right, and I never know I'm right," Frankel now says. "I'm not, ironically, a know-it-all. I love crowdsourcing, which I'm still doing. But I often second guess myself. But right now, I'm shocked by the people in the industry that would usually look at me and say to me, 'What are you doing? Don't do it.' But no one is saying that right now. They are saying, 'Keep going.'"

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