

Chris Cuomo Hits Back At CNN “Smear Campaign” With \$125M Arbitration Demand



By [Dominic Patten](#)
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Chris Cuomo, Jeff Zucker
AP

EXCLUSIVE: After months of legal anticipation following his December 2021 firing by [Jeff Zucker](#), [Chris Cuomo](#) has just launched the official opening salvo in what looks to be protracted battle with [CNN](#) over not only \$125 million in cash, but his character and family drama as well.

“As a result of Turner’s indefensible choice to unceremoniously fire him, Cuomo has been damaged in countless ways,” states a demand for arbitration filed Wednesday from Cuomo’s Freedman + Taitelman LLP and Clayman Rosenberg Kirshner & Linder LLP attorneys.

“Cuomo has had his journalistic integrity unjustifiably smeared, making it difficult if not impossible for Cuomo to find similar work in the future and damaging him in amounts exceeding \$125 million, which includes not only the remaining salary owed under the Agreement, but future wages lost as a result of CNN’s efforts to destroy his reputation in violation of the Agreement,” the filing adds. “Cuomo now seeks to recover the full measure of his damages against Turner and CNN,” it declares ([read the filing here](#)).

That \$125 million breaks down into “consequential damages” of no less than \$110 million out of the alleged “Turner and CNN’s breach of the express terms of the Agreement.” The additional \$15 million is essentially what Cuomo and his attorneys say remained due to him under his current contract when he was terminated “effective immediately” on [December 4](#) by then CNN president Zucker after claims of sexual misconduct were made against the [already-suspended host](#).

CNN’s seen an avalanche of changes of late with the fumbled firing and [payout](#) of Zucker and then ex-PR and marketing exec Allison Gollust, plus talent tub-thumping and incoming Warner Bros Discovery CEO [David Zaslav’s selection of Late Show EP Chris Licht](#) to now captain the [cable news ship](#). All that has at points rendered the lingering Cuomo controversy a dusty affair. Up until today, it almost seemed like old news that the relationship on and off camera between Chris Cuomo and his older brother and former New York Governor [Andrew Cuomo](#) is what saw the young sibling suspended on November 30 last year and somewhat started off the tumultuous chain of events.

With terms like “smear campaign” being used, that perspective will certainly shift with this juicy filing against the Daniel Petrocelli-repped CNN America Inc. and Turner Services Inc. Still, amidst the appearances in today’s document of rogues and characters like the [sexual harassment-accused ex-Empire State Governor, Zucker](#), Gollust, CNN talent Jake Tapper, Don Lemon, Jeffrey Toobin and Brian Stelter, [WarnerMedia CEO Jason Kilar](#), and an allegedly lightning speed internal “standards and procedures” investigation by law firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore, much of this ultimately comes down to the finer details of Cuomo’s employment contract.

One clause in particular that played out in public, as the arbitration filing says:

An additional, and similarly significant, legally unjustifiable breach of the Agreement was the complete failure by Zucker to abide by the terms of the Agreement by failing to instruct CNN employees not to disparage Cuomo. The Agreement requires that CNN “make reasonable efforts to instruct its employees not to make any intentionally disparaging comments regarding [Cuomo] in the context of [Cuomo’s] business and professional activities.” In fact, not only did Zucker and CNN fail to instruct CNN employees not to disparage Cuomo, as required by the Agreement, but they themselves openly disparaged Cuomo in violation of the Agreement, with Zucker leading the charge. Before Cuomo was terminated, Zucker at first claimed that he had been unaware of Cuomo’s discussions with Gov. Cuomo’s aides, when Zucker had done the same thing himself. After Cuomo’s termination, Zucker claimed that Cuomo had broken his word and that Cuomo misrepresented the extent of his support for his brother. Other CNN staff joined in the calculated campaign to smear Cuomo and destroy his reputation.

“It should by now be obvious that Chris Cuomo did not lie to CNN about helping his brother,” said lawyer Bryan Freedman to Deadline this morning.

“In fact, as the limited information released from WarnerMedia’s investigation makes clear, CNN’s highest-level executives not only knew about Chris’s involvement in helping his brother but also actively assisted the Governor, both through Chris and directly themselves,” the Freedman + Taitelman founding partner noted. “As CNN has admitted, network standards were changed in a calculated decision to boost ratings. When those practices were called into question, Chris was made the scapegoat.”

“The legal action filed today makes clear that CNN wrongfully terminated Chris and further violated the express terms of his employment agreement by allowing its employees to disparage him. Chris is owed a full apology from those responsible.”

Leaning into a trial if the contractually obligatory arbitration fails, the former *Cuomo Prime Time* host seems set on singlehandedly defying the [exceedingly well-compensated Zaslav’s desire for billions in savings](#) from the upcoming WarnerMedia and Discovery merger. Closed doors arbitration or not, today’s bombastic move will certainly prove messy for the combined company as Cuomo’s team makes good on their previously implied warning to pull back the soiled curtain on what was really going down during the now-canned Zucker’s reign.

The next move will be CNN responding to today’s filing with paperwork of its own on whether it believes there is an actual dispute to arbitrate here — and that could send this into the public sphere of the courts.

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