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Key Witness in Serebrennikov's Fraud Trial Claims 'Severe Pressure' From Investigators

June 16, 2020



Kirill Serebrennikov **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

A key witness in a multimillion-dollar criminal fraud case involving prominent theater director Kirill Serebrennikov has claimed that investigators obtained her testimony under duress, the Kommersant business daily reported Monday.

Serebrennikov is suspected of embezzling 133 million rubles ($1.9 million) in a case that his supporters have criticized as politically motivated. The artistic director of Moscow's Gogol Center theater and two other suspects were released on bail in 2019 after a year and a half under house arrest.

Related article: Russian Theater Director Serebrennikov's Fraud Case to Be Re-Tried, Court Says

Eleonora Filimonova, a former assistant accountant to another suspect in the case, was one of two employees to claim in 2017 that Serebrennikov's studio ran "slush funds."

Filimonova told the judge Monday that investigators had called her a "criminal" and threatened to jail her if she didn't sign the needed papers, according to Kommersant.

"They exerted severe pressure on me. ... They made me sign a statement that I knew everything and that there was criminal activity," Filimonova testified.

"I no longer had the strength to resist what they were saying," she was quoted by Kommersant as saying.

Filimonova is at least the fourth witness to claim providing testimony to investigators under duress.

One of the three earlier witnesses, all Russian Culture Ministry employees, claimed that investigators threatened that "you're either the prosecution's witness or a defendant."

While in home confinement, Serebrennikov lived through the premieres of his ballet at the Bolshoi Theater and his film at the Cannes Film Festival, as well as the loss of his mother.

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