

CELEBRITIES

Batali accuser's attorneys: Chef must be held accountable

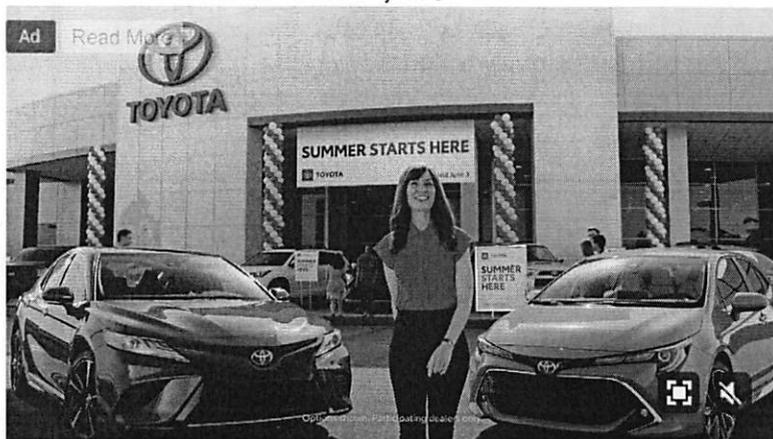
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BOSTON — Lawyers for a woman who says Mario Batali forcibly kissed and groped her in a Boston restaurant in 2017 said Thursday the celebrity chef must be held accountable.

Batali, who recently gave up financial stakes in all his restaurants, is to be arraigned Friday in Boston on a charge of indecent assault and battery, a spokeswoman for Suffolk District Attorney Rachael Rollins said.

It's the first criminal charge against Batali resulting from several sexual harassment and assault allegations that crippled his career amid the #MeToo movement.

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"Mr. Batali must be held accountable criminally and civilly for his despicable acts," attorneys Eric Baum and Matthew Fogelman said in an email to media.

Batali abused his celebrity status and enticed the woman to take a selfie with him, they said.

"While taking the photograph, Mario Batali groped her breasts, buttocks, and genitals, and kissed her repeatedly without her consent," the attorneys said.

The same woman previously sued Batali.

Batali's lawyer said his client denies the allegations.

"The charges, brought by the same individual without any new basis, are without merit," attorney Anthony Fuller said in his own email to news outlets. "He intends to fight the allegations vigorously and we expect the outcome to fully vindicate Mr. Batali."

Several other women have previously come forward to allege sexual misconduct by Batali.

Batali has apologized for some of those instances, saying the allegations "match up" with ways he has acted, while denying others.

"I have made many mistakes and I am so very sorry that I have disappointed my friends, my family, my fans and my team," Batali said in an email newsletter in 2017. "My behavior was wrong and there are no excuses. I take full responsibility."