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Abused niece of Linda Ann Weston suing the City of Philadelphia

Beatrice Weston, 20, the niece of convicted killer Linda Ann Weston, is suing the City of Philadelphia for placing her in Weston's care in 2002 and subjecting her to what authorities have described as a nightmarish decade of unrelenting torture at Weston's hands.

Beatrice Weston was one of five people rescued in October after police discovered four mentally disabled adults held in a dungeon-like basement of a Tacony apartment building.

She was locked in a cramped closet in an upstairs apartment, and authorities soon learned that she had been imprisoned by her aunt since she was 10. Authorities have said Weston moved Beatrice and the others around the country, terrorizing them, in a scheme to steal their Social Security benefits.

The civil rights suit, filed Monday in Common Pleas Court by the Philadelphia law firm Kline & Specter, alleges that a social worker and a member of the city solicitor's office arranged for custody of Beatrice to be given to Weston, despite Weston's 1983 conviction for starving a man to death in a closet.

The city also failed to conduct home investigations or arrange for health evaluations of Beatrice, the suit claims, and ignored warnings that could have resulted in Beatrice's rescue.

"During that time, Beatrice Weston was forcibly prostituted by Linda Ann Weston and was regularly beaten, starved, and denied medical and dental care, as well as schooling," according to the filing. "During these 10 years, the City of Philadelphia received numerous complaints that Linda Ann Weston was holding children captive in her basement."

Beatrice Weston has testified that her body is covered with scars from burns, cuts, pellet guns, and other weapons. After her rescue, Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey said he had never seen such severe injuries on a victim, "at least not a living victim."

Mark McDonald, a spokesman for Mayor Nutter, said the city would respond to the allegations in its court filings.

Weston and three alleged accomplices - her boyfriend, Gregory Thomas; her daughter, Jean McIntosh; and Eddie Wright, a homeless street preacher - are scheduled to go to trial in January. They face a slew of charges that include kidnapping, assault, and false imprisonment.

Nefertiti Savoy, a former social worker with the Department of Human Services, is named in the lawsuit for allegedly recommending that Beatrice be placed with Weston, as is Richard Ames, a member of the City Solicitor's Office, and Weston herself.

Savoy left DHS in 2008, McDonald said. Ames is still listed as an employee in the City Solicitor's Office. They could not be reached for comment.

The suit seeks damages for Beatrice Weston's pain and anguish, as well as payment for her substantial medical and therapy expenses, and compensation for loss of past and future earnings.

"Jurors are going to have to fix a value on every day, every month, every year that she was imprisoned," said Shanin Specter, Beatrice Weston's attorney. "There's no amount of money that's fair."

Specter said that Beatrice Weston was preparing to go to school in the fall and that she has been in therapy.

Weston was given custody of her niece in August 2002, after Beatrice's mother said she could not care for the girl. The lawsuit alleges that the city never visited Weston's home before recommending custody and never performed a background check on Weston, which would have disqualified her. Kevin Dougherty, the Family Court judge who oversaw the case, has said he was never advised of Weston's criminal record.

DHS was supposed to supervise the placement, but, according to the lawsuit, the agency never followed up beyond making one report that the girl was "safe."