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Former Penn student awarded \$11.6 M in lawsuit settlement

The then-College junior fell through a hole in the floor during an off-campus party

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A former Penn student was awarded \$11.6 million in the settlement of a lawsuit over an injury she sustained by falling in a house near campus.

Lorna Bernhoft, then a College junior, fell through the fourth floor of the house at 326 S. 42nd St. — near the intersection of 42nd and Pine streets — during a party on Oct. 12, 2010. She fell through a hole that had previously been a skylight and was covered with a piece of plywood and carpeting — a part of the floor the plaintiff said was a “death trap” in court documents.

Bernhoft fell 15 to 20 feet to a staircase below, landing on her tailbone, before she

slid down the stairs. She sustained serious injuries to her spine and head, rendering her a paraplegic.

The lawsuit claimed “willful, wonton, outrageous and reckless disregard for human life and safety” on the part of Joseph Palmer and Irene Palmer, the primary defendants and the owners of the house. It also said the owners were notified of the insufficiency of the covering on the skylight, and were negligent in not fixing it. The tenants in the house were also later named as defendants as the case developed.

The University was not named as a defendant.

“The case is important to the community because it recognizes that there are dangerous defects in rental housing, especially in off-campus housing, and every parent and student should be aware,” Tom Kline, the attorney who represented Bernhoft, told The Philadelphia Inquirer.