

THE HUFFINGTON POST

Motel Turned Blind Eye To Child Sex Traffickers For Profit, Suit Claims

“This lawsuit is the first among many to come that will hold hotel and motel owners, among others, accountable,” lawyers say.

By Nina Golgowski
3/14/17

A motel accused of looking the other way as children were shuffled in and out of its rooms for sexual exploitation is facing what may be the first lawsuit of its kind under a Pennsylvania statute.

In the lawsuit, filed Friday, a now 17-year-old girl accuses Philadelphia’s Roosevelt Inn of knowingly providing rooms to human traffickers over a near two-year period starting in 2013 for its own financial gain.

The girl, who is identified as M.B. in the suit, was just 14 years old when she said she was first forced to have sex at the motel with more than 1,000 men for as little as \$50, CBS 3 reported, citing the teen’s attorneys.

“This child was forced into sex slavery, paid to do things with men double, triple, quadruple her age,” her attorney, Nadeem Bezar of Philadelphia-based Kline & Specter PC, said at a press conference on Friday.

The northeast Philadelphia motel is the first business to be hit with such a lawsuit under Pennsylvania’s 2014 human trafficking statute, M.B.’s lawyers say. In addition to providing more resources for prosecutors in sex trafficking cases, Act 105 expands protection for victims and increases fines and penalties against individuals and businesses involved in human trafficking.

Though M.B.’s case may be the first related to the statute, her attorneys promised it won’t be the last.

“This lawsuit is the first among many to come that will hold hotel and motel owners, among others, accountable when they knowingly allow victimization of the most vulnerable in our society,” M.B.’s attorney Tom Kline said in a statement.

M.B. was regularly escorted into the motel wearing sexually explicit clothing and was “visibly treated in an aggressive manner” by her traffickers, her attorneys claim. “Men stood in the hallways and then entered and left the room in which M.B. was kept,” they added.

“The sexual exploitation of children must be addressed. It’s time to hold those facilitating these trafficking activities accountable,” Bezar said.

The lawsuit names the motel’s owner and manager Yagna Patel as a defendant, as well as UFVS Management Company, which in addition to managing the site oversees 40 properties in New Jersey, New York and Chicago, according to its website.

Patel, reached by the Philadelphia Inquirer, said he hadn’t seen the lawsuit and had no knowledge of any child trafficking taking place at the motel.

“We just rent the room and that’s all we can do,” he said.

Klein called the statement outrageous. “You have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to know that a hundred men are showing up over a period of a couple of days,” he said, according to CBS 3 News.

Bezar said people cleaning the motel rooms would remove boxes and trash cans full of used condoms.

“This is about as open and obvious as it gets,” he said.

UFVS Management Company did not immediately return a request for comment on Tuesday.

The lawsuit seeks more than \$50,000 in compensatory and punitive damages.