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NEWS

Arbitrator Awards \$24.5M in Trafficking Victims' Suit Against Hotel

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Litigation Reporter

What You Need to Know

- An arbitrator awarded \$24.5 million to two victims of sex trafficking.
- The plaintiffs alleged that the owner of a hotel where they were trafficked should have intervened.
- An attorney for the plaintiffs said a challenge in the case was nailing down the timeline of events that happened 10 years ago.

An arbitrator on Wednesday awarded \$24.5 million to two women in their lawsuit against a Philadelphia hotel where they said they were trafficked as minors.

The plaintiffs claimed they were repeatedly sold for sex and raped at a North American Motor Inn in 2013 and that the hotel’s owner, Ramara Inc., should have recognized and prevented the criminal activity occurring on its property.

Kline & Specter partner Nadeem Bezar, who represented the plaintiffs alongside Emily Marks, said the long span of time that elapsed between the plaintiffs’ trafficking and the resulting legal action presented some challenges during the litigation.

“In litigating any case where the tort is more than a decade old, memories of individuals and witnesses sometimes are difficult to locate,” Bezar said. “You’re asking people to deal with things they may or may not have seen on a hotel property 10 years ago.”

Bezar said the plaintiffs, referred to as B.H. and C.A., were able to identify information like the specific hotel where they were harmed and what their experiences were, but nailing down the exact timeline was trickier.

“What becomes difficult is having them identify the precise number of days they might have been there,” he said. “It may seem like generalities should cover the basis, but it’s not always true.”

Bezar said the plaintiffs were able to pull together a more specific time estimate based on records like documentation from the arrest of the plaintiffs’ traffickers. He noted that therapy records and victims’ recollections of seasonal changes can also be helpful in determining when an incident occurred.

According to a press release from Kline & Specter, both of the victim’s traffickers were sentenced to prison, and one is still serving time.

B.H. and C.A. alleged Ramara, as the owner of the North American Motor Inn, had a responsibility to intervene in their trafficking at the hotel. They asserted that there was a “culture of criminal activity” at the hotel, which Ramara did nothing to combat.

The defendant, represented by Thomas, Thomas & Hafer partner Hugh O’Niell, countered that Ramara was not the hotel’s operator when the plaintiff’s alleged harm occurred.

In motions for summary judgment, Ramara claimed a different company had been leasing the hotel in 2013 and that it did not control how the hotel was run at the time.

“Ramara did not have employees at the hotel and did not maintain a daily presence at the hotel during the time in which Plaintiff has alleged that she was trafficked. The evidence on record does not establish that Ramara breached a duty of care owed to Plaintiff,” the defendant argued in a motion for summary judgment.

O’Niell did not respond to a request for comment.

The two plaintiffs’ cases—captioned B.H. v. Ramara and A.C. v. Ramara—ultimately went to arbitration before Ricci Tyrrell Johnson & Grey shareholder William Ricci. Ricci respectively awarded the individual plaintiffs \$12 million and \$12.5 million.

Marks, Bezar’s co-counsel, said in a statement, “These awards are a significant victory in holding hotel owners and operators accountable for the open and obvious criminal activity that is occurring on their properties and will hopefully cause the hotels to act to deter such conduct moving forward.”