

Philly Landlord Settles Paralegal Assault Case For \$6M

By **Matthew Santoni**

Law360 (May 15, 2024, 11:21 AM EDT) -- The landlord of a Philadelphia office tower will pay \$6 million to settle a suit claiming that negligent security allowed a man to sneak into the building and sexually assault a paralegal at a small law firm working upstairs, according to the plaintiff's attorneys.

Kline & Specter announced that the deal Wednesday with 211 N. 13th Street Associates LP, North 13 LLC and Belmont Funding LLC would settle the lawsuit the firm brought on behalf of the victim, identified as R.F., stemming from the July 5, 2022, assault. Two other companies were dismissed from the complaint last year.

"But for the negligent security of the landlord and their security guard, this brutal attack would not have occurred. We hope that landlords in our city and elsewhere will realize the importance of having reasonable security to protect their tenants and employees, including from criminal acts of intruders," attorney Lorraine Donnelly of Kline & Specter, representing R.F., said in a statement announcing the settlement. "Our client will have a lifetime of healing from the scars of this avoidable tragedy."

R.F. filed a request to mark the case settled and closed Tuesday afternoon, according to the docket in Philadelphia's Court of Common Pleas.

The suit had claimed the landlords' security setup for the building didn't allow a security guard to see the front door to the lobby or the stairwells without looking at a camera feed; the assailant got past the key-card lock on the front door by slipping inside through a door that opened as someone was leaving.

The assailant, later identified as Willie Harris, then went unobserved and unimpeded up the stairs to the eighth floor, checking for unlocked doors along the way, until he reached the law firm's offices, the suit said.

Harris initially robbed R.F., and after noticing that she was alone in the office, assaulted her, the complaint said. When a co-worker returned to the office, Harris fled back down the stairs and out the front door, again unnoticed by the front-desk guard, the suit claimed.

Harris was later arrested and convicted on charges including involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, burglary and robbery, and is awaiting sentencing.

R.F.'s suit said that in addition to the lack of a view, the building didn't have a separate lock on the stairwell doors or any buzzers and alarms that would alert the guard that someone had entered them. The suit also claimed building staff had known that someone had been trying to gain access to the building earlier that afternoon, but didn't take extra precautions or warn tenants or their employees, like R.F.

Counsel for the defendants did not immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

R.F. is represented by Thomas R. Kline and Lorraine H. Donnelly of Kline & Specter.

The defendants are represented by Robert L. Sanzo of Litchfield Cavo LLP.

The case is R.F. v. 211 N. 13th Street Associates et al., case number 230300228, in the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.

Update: This article has been updated with additional information.