



Philadelphia Teen Claims Motel Knew She Was Being Sex Trafficked but Did Nothing

BY JEFF TRUESDELL

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A teenage girl in Philadelphia was the victim of sex trafficking, over two years, at a motel that knowingly profited from her exploitation, she alleges in a new civil suit.

The suit — filed Friday in Philadelphia Common Pleas Court — specifically accuses the Roosevelt Inn in Philadelphia, its manager, Yagna Patel, and its parent company, UFVS Management Company, of profiting by renting rooms used in the teen's prostitution.

The girl "was 14 years old when she was forced into the illegal sex trade in 2013 and was exploited through 2014," her lawyers alleged in a statement.

"The Philadelphia girl, now 17, was dressed in sexually explicit clothing and was 'visibly treated in an aggressive manner' by traffickers," the statement claims, quoting from the lawsuit.

The complaint, which was obtained by PEOPLE, alleges the defendants "knew or had constructive knowledge" that the victim was "being sexually exploited" at the Roosevelt motel.

The suit further alleges they failed to intervene or contact police and continued to pocket revenue from the room rentals, as the teen was trafficked.

Her attorneys say the civil suit is the first "among many to come" against hotel and motel owners for allegedly profiting from sex trafficking.

"It's an ongoing epidemic that requires attention," attorney **Nadeem Bezar**, with the Philadelphia-based firm Kline & Specter PC, tells PEOPLE.

A call to the Roosevelt Inn to seek a manager or an attorney was answered by a man who declined to give his name. "We are not making any comment 'til we figure out what it is," he tells PEOPLE. "They have to investigate everything before they can make a statement."

An employee who answered at UFVS Management also said the company had no comment, but they declined to identify themselves.

Patel, the motel manager, told Philly.com he had “no knowledge” that the teen had been victimized on his property. “We just rent the room and that’s all we can do,” he said. (Patel could not immediately be reached by PEOPLE.)

The suit alleges her traffickers placed Internet advertisements that listed her under a fake name and directed customers to call a phone number and settle on a cash price for sex, then they were directed to the Roosevelt Inn.

“An individual named ‘Abdul’ would hold himself out as the clerk, staff member or employee at the Roosevelt Inn,” the suit claims. “‘Abdul’ would then direct the individual to the floor and room where [the girl] and her traffickers were staying. ‘Abdul’ was fully aware that [the girl] and other underage children were compelled to perform sex for money.”

The suit claims the defendants know who “Abdul” is.

The complaint alleges men “stood in the hallways” outside of the room where the teen was engaged in sex acts and that the room “contained used condoms and condom wrappers and ... frequently smelled of marijuana.”

Bezar, the teen’s attorney, says her accusations have been successfully prosecuted in criminal court.

“It was absolutely a police investigation. The traffickers were arrested, were thoroughly prosecuted, have either pled or were found guilty and the police as well as the prosecuting attorneys were 100 percent on top of this situation,” Bezar says.

“Both the Philadelphia Police Department and the prosecutor’s office have been really conscientious about doing what they can to stamp it out,” he says.

“This is game of what I call ‘whack-a-mole’ — it just keeps cropping up, and you just keep knocking ‘em out.”

Philadelphia police did not immediately respond to a request from PEOPLE to provide records of prior criminal complaints or arrests at the motel address. The prosecutor’s office also did not immediately respond to inquiries.

However, the Roosevelt has been the site of multiple prostitution stings in recent years, according to local news outlets. One such pair of arrests, in October 2014, allegedly involved the sexual exploitation of children, Metro Philadelphia reports.

The teen's civil suit was filed under an existing statute that was amended in 2014 to allow for civil penalties against those alleged to be "enticing, recruiting, harboring (and) forcing unwilling participants and minors into sexual servitude," Bezar says.

"She was not an employee of the hotel," Bezar says of the girl. "It was a staging area."

"She was a young kid separated from her family, did what she needed to do to find shelter and as a result ended up with the wrong crowd, slowly lured into this kind of lifestyle and this method of survival," he says. "Sadly, I don't think it's uncommon."