

Philly Foster Agency Will Pay \$9M To End Trafficking Case

By P.J. D'Annunzio

Law360 (October 8, 2024, 10:35 PM EDT) -- A woman who was sexually abused and sold into prostitution as a girl by her foster mother's son has settled her case with an agency responsible for her welfare for \$9.38 million, partially funded by a previous \$24 million settlement from a Philadelphia Days Inn where the trafficking was said to occur, her lawyers said Tuesday.

The settlement was reached a few days before the Oct. 15 trial date, according to attorneys from Kline & Specter PC, and resolves allegations from a woman identified as D.P. against First Home Care. The suit alleged the agency should have been more vigilant about checking in on D.P., who lived in the home of Yvette Martin and her son Craig Johnson starting in 2009.

Johnson was convicted of sex trafficking of minors and sentenced to 24 years in prison in 2013.

The litigation originally included Catholic Social Services, the agency that placed D.P. in Martin's home, as a defendant, but it was dismissed from the suit in July 2023. Months earlier, in February of 2023, Days Inn entered into a global \$24 million settlement to resolve claims that it allowed sex trafficking to occur in its Roosevelt Boulevard location.

Johnson began "grooming" D.P. shortly after she arrived at Martin's home, the suit said.

"While D.P. was living in Martin's foster home, Johnson sexually assaulted and raped D.P. and then sold her for sexual purposes for longer than a year," the **complaint** said.

"As a result of such access to foster children within his mother's foster home, Johnson further sexually exploited D.P. by advertising, arranging, and overseeing 'dates' on which D.P. would engage in various sexual acts with individuals known as 'johns' for money at the Days Inn facility," the complaint said.

First Home Care, which provided child welfare services to the Martin household, failed to ensure that D.P. was in a safe living environment, the complaint alleged.

The claims that the **\$24 million settlement** with Days Inn resolved had focused on the motel operators' negligence in allowing a hotbed of sex and labor trafficking to thrive in the area, according to a complaint filed by a plaintiff identified as C.A.

D.P. was one of eight plaintiffs included in the Days Inn settlement.

"This was an awful experience for our client who was 14 at the time. Nothing like this should happen to a 14-year-old child who has already had a difficult start to her life," said Nadeem Bezar of Kline & Specter, who represents D.P.

"We hope that she's on her way to healing and that she can find some peace moving forward," Bezar said.

Emily Marks, who worked on the case with Bezar, said of the result, "I'm happy for D.P., she's been through a lot and her life has been demolished through this terrible placement."

Counsel for First Home Care did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

D.P. is represented by Nadeem Bezar, Emily Marks and Alex Van Dyke of Kline & Specter PC.

First Home Care is represented by Michael W. Bootier of Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC.

The case is D.P. v. Catholic Social Services et al., case number 220401713, in the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

--Editing by Leah Bennett.