

U.S. First Lawsuits Are Filed Over Deaths in Oakland Warehouse Fire

Complaints could be consolidated with others in the case, attorney says



David and Kimberly Gregory, the parents of Michela Gregory, top center left and top center right, listen as attorney Mary Alexander, center, speaks to reporters outside the Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland, Calif., on Friday. The parents of Ms. Gregory, who died in Oakland's deadly warehouse fire, filed a lawsuit in the disaster. PHOTO: DAN HONDA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By **ALEJANDRO LAZO**

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SAN FRANCISCO—The first lawsuits were filed Friday in connection with the devastating Oakland warehouse fire that killed 36 people earlier in December.

Attorney Mary Alexander said she filed two civil complaints on behalf of the families of two victims who died in the blaze.

The suits were filed by the families of Michela Gregory, a 20-year-old university student, and Griffin Madden, a 23-year-old recent university graduate.

Those complaints could be consolidated with any others filed in relation to the case, said Ms. Alexander, who represents the families of both victims.

“As a result of the horrific, gross negligence of the defendants in this case, these two young people have lost their lives,” Ms. Alexander said during a news conference. “They had every gift but the gift of time.”

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Ms. Alexander said those named in the complaints include the building's

owner, Chor Ng, and the owner's daughter, Eva Ng. It also names Derick Ion Almena and Micah Allison, the couple who transformed the warehouse into an artist community where 20 people lived, though the space wasn't permitted as a residence.

The building's owner hasn't responded to repeated requests for comment and wasn't immediately able to be reached for comment Friday. Mr. Almena and Ms. Allison weren't able to be immediately reached for comment. An attorney for the couple didn't immediately return a call seeking comment.

The suits also name Jon Hrabko, a promoter of the event, and the record label 100% Silk as well as Joel Shanahan, a performer who goes by the name Golden Donna. The label, 100% Silk has said it didn't promote the event. Mr. Shanahan releases music through the label.

Messrs Hrabko and Shanahan weren't able to be reached immediately for comment.

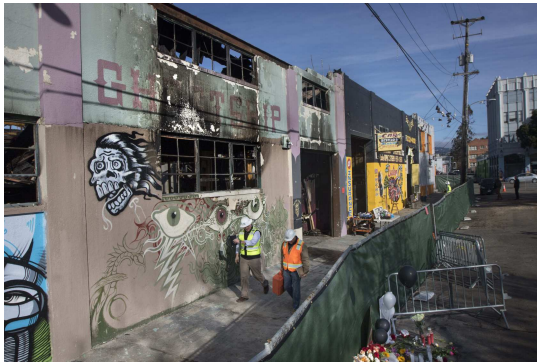
Britt Brown, a co-owner of 100% Silk, said the record label hadn't been involved with promoting the event, but rather in the electronic music world it is common practice for artists to include the name of the label on fliers promoting performances.

"We are still grieving from this awful tragedy like everyone else. I can only imagine how Michela and Griffin's families must be feeling, our hearts ache for them," Ms. Brown said.

"In the case of the Ghost Ship event, 100% Silk did not book, organize, promote, or have any involvement with it, beyond the fact that a few artists we've worked with were performing on the bill."

The suit names Daniel Lopez and Omar Vega, the owners of a next-door neighbor who Ms. Alexander said provided construction materials to the Ghost Ship and provided electricity to the warehouse through a hole in the wall. Mr. Vega, reached by telephone, declined to comment.

Ms. Alexander also said she filed separate claims against the city of Oakland and Alameda County. A spokeswoman for Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf declined to comment. A call to the county administrator seeking comment wasn't immediately returned.



Inspectors at the Oakland warehouse named Ghost Ship earlier in December. PHOTO: PAUL KURODAZUMA PRESS

The
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fire in Rhode Island killed 100.

The city of Oakland has come under increasing scrutiny since the Dec. 2 fire for failing to prevent the blaze. City officials have said no building inspector had been in the warehouse for the past three decades even though complaints had been made for years.

Oakland Fire Department Chief Teresa DeLoach Reed also said earlier in December there is no record of any fire inspections at the Oakland warehouse. Permits, changes of occupancy, or a building being identified as an active business trigger inspections, she said.

The warehouse was home to some 20 artists but wasn't permitted for residential use. No permit for the concert held on the evening of the fire was issued by the city.

Those who visited the Ghost Ship said it was clear there were fire hazards, as the warehouse was a maze of workspaces, wooden furniture and instruments. A narrow wooden staircase led to the second-floor space where the performance took place that night, and many who perished in the blaze were trapped.

Ms. Michela was a student at the San Francisco State University's school of education. She attended the party that night with her boyfriend, Alex Vega, 22, who also died in the fire.

Ms. Gregory studied communicative disorders, according to her university, and worked at Urban Outfitters, according to her Facebook profile.

Ms. Alexander described Mr. Madden as a "fine young man" who had graduated from the University of California at Berkeley having studied philosophy.

He was working at the university at the time of his death and was a Berkeley resident.

Write to Alejandro Lazo at alejandro.lazo@wsj.com

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