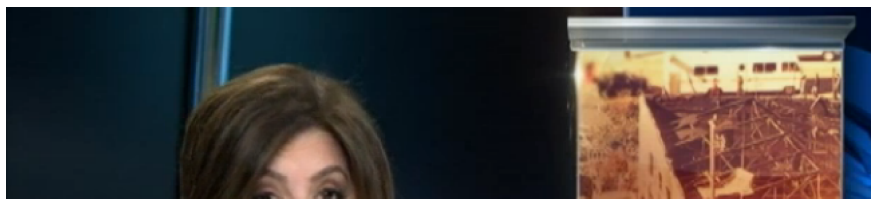




# Parents of Woman Found Dead in Boyfriend's Arms File First Lawsuit in Oakland Fire

By Elyce Kirchner and Associated Press



The parents of a 20-year-old college student who died in the arms of her boyfriend in Oakland's deadly warehouse fire filed the first lawsuit Friday in the disaster, blaming the building's owner, chief tenant and others. Elyce Kirchner reports. (Published Friday, Dec. 23, 2016)



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Crab Fishing Strike Taking a Toll on Fishers, Customers

The parents of a 20-year-old college student who died in the arms of her boyfriend in Oakland's deadly warehouse fire filed the first lawsuit Friday in the disaster, blaming the building's owner, chief tenant and others.

The lawsuit, filed in Alameda County Superior Court, evoked the last moments of

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The building plunged into darkness when the fire started, the lawsuit said.

Gregory and the others "tried to exit the warehouse, but were unable to exit due to the unsafe conditions and configuration of the warehouse," the lawsuit alleges.

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"It is just reprehensible" and "gross negligence in the highest degree to have this happen," attorney Mary Alexander, who filed the lawsuit on behalf of parents Kimberly and David Gregory, said. Alexander on Friday also filed a civil lawsuit on behalf of 23-year-old Griffin Madden of Berkeley.

Gregory and Madden were among 36 people killed Dec. 2 when a fire broke out in the illegally converted Ghost Ship warehouse that was hosting a \$10-a-head music performance and party.

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The loss of a child is unimaginable, said David Gregory, Michela's father. "She just loved life and she is never coming home. We will never see her again," he said.

It was the deadliest building fire in the United States in more than a decade.

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"It's really horrific, irresponsible actions and inactions on the part of this building owner, those associated with this event, and the city that cost the life of this beautiful young lady and the lives of 35 others," Alexander said.

Gregory's body was found with that of Alex Vega, 22, who had been her boyfriend from high school. Vega's arms were around her, the lawsuit said, citing the coroner's office.



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1-5 hours

5-10 hours

10+ hours

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"Her and Alex loved each other. They just wanted to have a good time," David Gregory said.

Nothing they do will bring Michela Gregory back, but the woman's family says the tragedy could have been avoided. They want justice for not only their child but also the others who perished.



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The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages from building owner Chon Ng, principal tenant Derick Ion Almenda and others who lived and used the work spaces and makeshift rooms in the warehouse and promoted the night's event.

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Ng has retained a Southern California-based attorney, Keith G. Bremer of Bremer Whyte Brown & O'Meara. City officials say Ng had a business license for more than two decades on the property and has paid all business taxes.

Lawyers retained by the building owner and chief tenant did not immediately return requests for comment Friday.

The Alameda County district attorney's office has said it is evaluating whether any criminal charges are warranted in the blaze.

Alexander said the family planned to file a separate claim against Oakland and Alameda County alleging negligence by officials.

People living in and near the building had lodged repeated complaints to building inspectors, police and others about parties, trash and illegal residences at the converted warehouse. But officials failed to respond to safety complaints and did not ensure that the warehouse was fire safe.

"It all could have been prevented," Alexander insisted. "These beautiful, young people should never have been in this kind of situation where fire breaks out and you couldn't escape, you couldn't get out."

Alexander believes more lawsuits and claims will be filed. It is likely that the individual cases will be consolidated in one court with one judge, she added.