

Hailey Owens Parents File Wrongful Death Suit Against Daughter's Killer
News

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(news-leader.com) - The parents of a 10-year-old girl kidnapped and killed last month have filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the man accused of murdering their daughter, calling the man's alleged actions "evil."



tacey Barfield and Markus Owens, the biological parents of Hailey Owens, filed the suit Friday in Greene County seeking financial damages against Craig Michael Wood.

The petition says Wood was observed kidnapping Hailey on Feb. 18 and that the girl's body, with a gunshot wound to the back of the head, was found at Wood's home on Feb. 19.

The suit says Wood was either negligent in the handling of a loaded weapon or intentionally shot the girl, which is what prosecutors are arguing.

The petition says Hailey's parents have "suffered severely and in the future will suffer, by reason of the injuries sustained by and from Hailey Owens' death."

The suit seeks financial damages to cover costs associated with Hailey's death, but it also seeks punitive damages to "punish Defendant Wood and to deter him and others from like conduct."

In making the claim for punitive damages, the petition says "Wood's actions were grossly negligent, reckless, intentional, and/or outrageous, making no effort to mitigate the damages or avoid the harm to Hailey Owens or (the parents), and acting with evil motive and reckless indifference to the rights of Hailey Owens and her parents...."

The suit does not specify how much money the parents are seeking, only what the court "may deem just under the circumstances."

Wood is charged with first-degree murder, armed criminal action and child kidnapping in connection with Hailey's death.

Authorities say that Wood abducted the girl during daylight hours, took her to the basement of his home and shot her in the back of the head.

Police say the body of Hailey was found in two garbage bags inside a plastic storage tote in Wood's basement, which smelled of bleach.

Wood was arrested at his Stanford Street home a few hours after Hailey was reportedly kidnapped.

The lawsuit was filed, on behalf of Hailey's parents, by attorney David Ransin.

Ransin last week sent a letter to the News-Leader that said he is representing the parents regarding all matters related to and arising from the abduction and loss of their daughter.

Ransin said he is representing the family at a lesser fee and donating the fee to a nonprofit fighting child abuse.

"I will use my 32 years of experience representing wrongful death victims and their families to achieve some sense of civil justice for my clients while guiding them through this process," Ransin said in the letter, adding:

"In recognition that even the largest monetary recovery in the world could never fully make up for the loss of their daughter and all of their suffering, I am representing this family at a significantly reduced fee, and I will donate 100 percent of that fee to Bikers Against Child Abuse."

Speaking only as an observer, attorney Robert Palmer, of the Law Offices of PalmerOliver in Springfield, said that filing this suit during the ongoing criminal case against Wood is "a little unusual, but not completely unusual."

"I could see myself doing the same thing in the same circumstance," he said.

Palmer said wrongful death cases have a three-year statute of limitations. Attorneys will usually advise their clients, he said, to allow criminal proceedings to be completed before filing such a suit, but this case is different.

Palmer said he has not spoken with Ransin, but he thinks the family's attorney may be trying to secure financial assets for the family before they are depleted, which may happen over the course of the trial.

Authorities have said they found evidence of a \$1 million trust in Wood's name. But no documentation of the trust has been produced in court or in court filings.

Palmer said Ransin may be trying to put a freeze on those funds.

He added that this case will not affect the criminal case against Wood because the civil case, though started, can be put on hold until the criminal case runs its course.

"I hope he's really successful," Palmer said. "Cause that guy is an evil person."