

Family of 20-year-old brings first suit in California fire

Ellen Knickmeyer, Associated Press Updated 1:22 am, Saturday, December 24, 2016



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FILE - In this Dec. 7, 2016 file photo, Oakland fire officials walk past the remains of the Ghost Ship warehouse damaged from a dead fire in Oakland, Calif. The landlord of an Oakland warehouse where 36 ... [more](#)

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — 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 [San Francisco State University](#) student [Michela Gregory](#), saying she was trapped on the second floor of the 10,000-square-foot building that was a jumble of makeshift stairs and room dividers with no clear exit paths.

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.

Gregory was one of 36 people killed Dec. 2 when fire broke out in the converted warehouse that was hosting a \$10-a-head music performance and party.

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

"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," lawyer **Mary Alexander**, who filed the lawsuit on behalf of parents Kimberly and David Gregory, said by phone.

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

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.

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages from building owner **Chor 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.

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 alleging negligence by city 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.

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