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Ga. Hotel Sex Trafficking Suit Settles Before Trial

By **Kelcey Caulder**

Law360 (November 27, 2023, 5:42 PM EST) -- A group of women who said they were for years victims of sex trafficking at Atlanta-area hotels agreed to settle on the eve of trial after suing hotel owners and operators they said ignored the crimes happening at their properties.

Counsel for the women, identified in court documents as Jane Does 2-4, and Carolyn Levy Gilliam, the administrator of the estate of the late Jane Doe 1, told Law 360 they agreed over the weekend to settle their claims against the owners and operators of a Red Roof Inn in Smyrna, a Suburban Extended Stay in Chamblee, an Extended Stay America in Atlanta and a Microtel Inn & Suites in Atlanta.

Trial had been set to start Monday morning in Atlanta. Details of the settlement were not immediately available.

In the October 2021 lawsuit, the women alleged they were trafficked at the hotels at various times from 2010 to 2016 and that the owners and operators knew or should have known what was happening at their properties, but did not put a stop to it because they profited by renting rooms to traffickers. Hotel employees were also complicit in the crime, the women alleged, as they often acted as "look-outs" for traffickers, alerting them when other guests grew suspicious or police were present at the hotels.

Jane Doe 3, who said she was trafficked at the Extended Stay America in Atlanta from 2009 to 2010, alleged that one of the hotel's employees even offered to sell her lingerie when she told them about the criminal activity taking place on the premises. They did not offer to help her, she said.

Jane Doe 1, who died in August 2023, alleged that in addition to acting as lookouts, hotel employees at the Red Roof Inn in Atlanta also solicited her for sex.

The women said the hotel owners and operators could not claim they did not know about the trafficking at their Atlanta-area properties given that online reviews posted by guests frequently mention prostitution and drugs and the arrest of known sex traffickers like Quintavious Obie, who was sentenced to 21 years in prison after it was discovered that he "completely controlled the third floor" of the Microtel.

The sheer number of men visiting the hotel each day for short visits to hotel rooms should have alerted the owners and operators to the trafficking taking place at the hotels, the women said, as well as the physical state of the women who stayed in those rooms. They added that victims were often beaten in the public parking lots of the hotels and that rooms were often left with "blood everywhere," the women alleged.

"Even after these defendants had every reason to know about the prevalence of sex trafficking at their hotels, the relationship between pimps, prostitution, and trafficking, and the sex trafficking ventures involving Jane Doe 2 and others at their hotels," Jane Doe 2 said they continued to profit from the rent traffickers paid to facilitate the women's "trafficking and victimization."

In response to the allegations, Red Roof Inn and other hotel owners and operators denied that sex trafficking took place in the hotels. Red Roof Franchising, in an answer to the complaint, denied that any trafficking occurred while it was a franchisor of any of the hotels.

Westmont Hospitality Group Inc., which according to court records operated the Red Roof property in Smyrna and bought the Suburban Extended Stay in July 2011, and Varahi Hotel LLC were both dismissed from the suit in August 2023 after they resolved claims with the women, court records indicate. The details of those agreements are not public.

Counsel for the defendants did not respond immediately to requests for comment Monday.

Jane Does 2-4 and Carolyn Levy Gilliam are represented by Amanda Kay Seals, John Earl Floyd, Jonathan

Tonge, Juliana Mesa, Manoj Sam Varghese, Tiana Scogin Mykkeltvedt and Michael Rosen Baumrind of Bondurant Mixson & Elmore LLP and Patrick J. McDonough of Andersen Tate & Carr PC.

Red Roof Inns Inc., FMW RRI NC LLC, Red Roof Franchising LLC, RRI West Management LLC and RRI III LLC are represented by Admir Allushi, Emma Jeanette Fennelly, P. Michael Freed, Marcella Coladangelo Ducca and Charles Kyle Reed of Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP and C. Ashley Saferight, Sandra Wunderlich and Chelsea R. Mikula of Tucker Ellis LLP.

The case is Jane Doe 1 et al. v. Westmont Hospitality Group Inc et al., case number 1:21-cv-04278, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia.

--Editing by Kelly Duncan.

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