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STAMFORD

The ADVOCATE

Rape victim sues Stamford Hotel Lawsuit: Attack should have been prevented, stopped

By John Christoffersen
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A woman raped at gunpoint in front of her children in a Stamford hotel parking garage has filed a lawsuit accusing the hotel of failure to prevent the 2006 attack.

The lawsuit says the assailant roamed the Marriot hotel and parking lot for days without being questioned by security and spent "many hours" looking for victims the day of the attack. The day before the rape, at least one hotel employee noticed the man loitering near the entrance of the parking lot and acting suspiciously, but no one did anything, according to the lawsuit.

Hotel patrons also saw the man wandering throughout the hotel parking lot, according to the lawsuit.

"What happened here is a parent's worst nightmare," attorneys Paul Slager and Ernest Teitell said in a statement on behalf of the family. "It goes without saying that the impact of this horrific event on both the parents and the children is devastating. This event has permanently altered every one of their lives in a really terrible way."

Gary Fricker of Danbury was convicted a year later in the attack.

The lawsuit contends the hotel failed to take adequate and reasonable security precautions to prevent the attack, failed to monitor and patrol the parking lot and failed to adequately train employees in basic security techniques. The hotel also should have known

about a series of reported crimes, including sexual assaults in the area in the months and years before the attack, the lawsuit states.

The lawsuit seeks more than \$15,000 in damages. It was filed last month in the state Superior Court in Stamford by the woman, identified as Jane Doe, and her children against the Stamford Marriot Hotel & Spa, Marriot International Inc. and the companies operating the hotel through a franchise agreement.

Telephone messages were left yesterday for Donald Derrico, the hotel's attorney.

Fricker was sentenced in November to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, risk of injury to a minor, and robbery. Prosecutors said Fricker assaulted the 40-year-old woman inside her minivan at the Marriot Hotel & Spa on Oct. 10, 2006.

Fricker also pointed a handgun at her two children, both younger than 7, and threatened to sexually assault one of them.

The victims have been in therapy and counseling since the attack, according to the lawsuit, which noted that the children "suffered the fear, horror, and extreme emotional trauma" of seeing their mother attacked and raped and their own lives threatened.

Her attorney read a letter in court in which she said she stopped functioning after the assault and is confronted every day with situations that make her afraid.

"Right after the assault, I became a zombie," the woman said in her statement. "I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't think, I couldn't drive a car, I couldn't hold a conversation. I shut myself inside the house, spent a lot of time in the shower, first to wash myself clean and then later to have a place to cry freely, and I jumped every time the telephone rang."

The woman was loading her children into their safety seats in the van when the assailant approached her from behind, placed a metal object against her back and told her he had a gun.

He stole items from her pocketbook, forced her into the seat next to the children and raped her.

The attacker ran when she screamed for help as another vehicle drove up the ramp.

In her court statement, the woman said the pain from the trauma of the attack "has diminished a little bit" but she remains fearful and worries about the long-term effects on her children.

"We were trapped in that car alone, being physically hurt and threatened, being forced against our wills, being terrorized by a threatening brute- and no one came to help us," she wrote. "We were in a privileged environment at a luxury hotel where many other mothers and children are doing the same thing every day."