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# Albany, NY, Nursing Home Hit With \$2M Verdict Over Death

By **Mike Curley**

Law360 (November 7, 2024, 6:20 PM EST) -- A New York federal jury has hit the Albany County Nursing Home with a \$2 million verdict in a suit by a woman alleging the staff neglected her father and did nothing as he lay dying in bed.

In a **verdict** reached Wednesday, the jury found that Lori LaRock had proven her Nursing Home Bill of Rights claims against the nursing home and also assessed that the nursing home should face punitive damages, though that number was not included in the verdict.

The verdict however found that LaRock hadn't proven her Federal Nursing Home Reform Act claims against the nursing home's executive director, Larry Slatky, or the nursing home itself, but had proven such claims against supervisor Debbie Gossman and nurse Rhonda Lyga. The jury also sided with LaRock in finding Gossman and Lyga liable for medical malpractice.

The jury awarded LaRock \$1.5 million for her father's conscious pain and suffering prior to his death, and \$500,000 for his loss of life, according to the verdict form.

In LaRock's **complaint**, she said that her father, Roger Sanford, was placed in the taxpayer-funded nursing home in August 2017 because of his Alzheimers and heart disease, but her father was often left unattended and uncared for at the "understaffed" facility.

She alleged that she regularly visited and found him unshaven and covered in his own excrement, and on one occasion, after finding Sanford covered in his own urine, LaRock was told that she would have to change him because no staff was available to do so.

Staff would also refuse to feed Sanford or treat his severe medical conditions by leaving before his treatment was complete, despite knowing that Sanford was unable to complete treatment himself.

LaRock also told the court that Slatky had threatened that if she went to the state Department of Health, the paperwork would be "lost" and would go nowhere.

As Sanford's health deteriorated in late February 2018, LaRock said the staff did nothing to help or treat him, and on March 1, LaRock found her father in severe distress, and Gossman and Lyga did nothing to help, despite knowing of the distress.

LaRock called 911 and paramedics reported that there was no facility staff in the room or any facility staff report available, according to the complaint. Sanford died March 3.

"For years, the Albany County Nursing Home was a house of horrors," said Ilann M. Maazel of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff Abady Ward & Maazel LLP, representing LaRock, on Thursday. "We are gratified that the jury has finally held Albany County, this home, and its employees to account for the horrific suffering and premature death of Mr. Sanford."

Hannah Brudney of Emery Celli, also representing LaRock, added, "We are pleased to see Albany County Nursing Home held accountable for its mistreatment of Mr. Sanford. We expect nursing homes to take care of our vulnerable loved ones, not to let them struggle, suffer, and die alone."

Representatives for the nursing home could not immediately be reached for comment Thursday.

LaRock is represented by Ilann M. Maazel and Hannah Brudney of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff Abady Ward & Maazel LLP.

The defendants are represented by Kevin P. Burke of Burke Scolamiero Law Firm.

The case is LaRock v. Albany County Nursing Home et al., case number 1:19-cv-00604, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York.

--Editing by Andrew Cohen.

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