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*Emily Marks and Nadeem Bezar* Emily Marks, left, and Nadeem Bezar, right, of Kline & Specter

## Days Inn Agrees to Pay \$24M to Settle Sex Trafficking Claims

“The traffickers were prosecuted, they’re incarcerated and now it’s time to hold the hotel accountable for what was happening in their hallways,” said Kline & Specter’s Emily Marks.

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Aleeza Furman

Days Inn reached a \$24 million settlement with eight victims of human trafficking who claimed the hotel failed to intervene with their abuse.

The plaintiffs’ attorneys said the interplay of criminal and civil matters created a difficult discovery process.

They said persistence from both the plaintiffs and their attorneys as well as a scheduled trial date pushed the defendants to settle.

A Philadelphia Days Inn has reached a \$24 million settlement with eight human trafficking victims, resolving claims that the hotel allowed the then-minors to be abused on its premises, according to a Thursday announcement from the plaintiffs’ Kline & Specter attorneys.

“The traffickers were prosecuted,” said Kline & Specter’s Emily Marks, who represented the plaintiffs alongside Nadeem Bezar. “They’re incarcerated and now it’s time to hold the hotel accountable for what was happening in their hallways.”

The interplay of criminal tangled up in a civil suit over human trafficking made for a complicated path toward building a case, said Marks, who has a track record of obtaining large settlements on behalf of human trafficking victims. And pursuing the litigation over the years leading up to the settlement required a great deal of persistence from both the plaintiffs and their attorneys.

Marks and Bezar said that much of the litigation played out in motions and discovery court, as the plaintiffs lawyers struggled to obtain depositions from far-flung witnesses, several of whom were in jail or federal prison. Those challenges were further exacerbated by the pandemic, the time elapsed since the alleged abuse, and concerns over protecting the plaintiffs' identities.

Still, Bezar said that they established that "we're not going away" in their pursuit for depositions during the discovery process by aggressively tracking down key witnesses. And after the plaintiffs stayed strong through an intense deposition process, the scheduling of trial dates in six of the cases served as a critical catalyst in prompting the defendants to settle.

The eight plaintiffs, whose suits were coordinated for discovery, accused the owners of the Days Inn on Roosevelt Boulevard of ignoring signs that they were being trafficked for sex at the hotel. In addition, they alleged that the hotel negligently hired a convicted felon who was prohibited from performing security work to serve as a guard. The guard was one of a number of people eventually prosecuted for involvement in the trafficking operation.

"For us, this was a clear case of liability," Marks explained. "You can't bury your head in the sand."

Days Inn, represented by McCormick & Priore, denied that it was responsible for the alleged trafficking or that it was aware of the abuse. In a motion for partial summary judgment in one of the cases, the defendant argued, "plaintiff is unable to establish that the Days Inn even knew she was on the premises, let alone acted with outrageous or reckless conduct towards her."

Philip Priore and Conrad Benedetto, who represent the defendant, did not respond to requests for comment, nor did a media contact for Days Inn's parent company Wyndham Hotels.

According to Kline & Specter's announcement of the agreement, Bezar and Marks refused to make the settlement confidential.

Bezar said the settlement is "a different kind of result" from the incarceration of the traffickers because it gives voice to the victims. "This is 'holy cow these 20-somethings all of the sudden have somebody who's actually paying attention to them.'"