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A mother feels outrage

Parent objects to girl's death being used to explain theft

BY JON SHUGARTS

BRIDGEPORT [--] Angry. Upset. Outraged.

Those were just some of the emotions that Retemar Robinson said she felt upon learning that the former head of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury had said her daughter's death contributed to his decisions to steal thousands of dollars from the club.

"There are no words to describe how I felt this morning," she said. "For Mr. Generali to have the audacity to blame all his charges and all the things that he did on the death of my daughter that was just horrible."

Robinson is suing the club in Waterbury Superior Court in connection with the death of her daughter, Brianna Murray, who nearly drowned in the club's pool in 2008. Brianna was only 5 years old when she slipped beneath the water during a free swim with other children. She was pronounced brain dead and was taken off life support days after the June 2008 tragedy.



Bianna Murray, who died after an accident in the pool at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury. Contributed photo

The club's former executive director, Robert Generali, 52, is set to be sentenced next month for theft, wire fraud and tax crimes after federal authorities say he stole thousands from the club to pay for personal luxuries.

But in asking a judge to spare Generali a lengthy sentence, his attorney claimed in court documents that Generali was in an alcoholic fog since the girl died. He claimed Generali committed the offenses while feeling guilt over her death, which led to a "progressive deterioration of his sense of self-worthiness and progressively greater alcohol abuse."

Robinson was joined by her attorney, Kathleen Nastri, on Tuesday during a press conference in the Bridgeport law offices of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder. The suit against the club claims it failed to properly train its lifeguards, among other things.

Robinson said she still has sleepless nights thinking about the loss of her daughter, a happy, outgoing girl who everyone fell in love with. After Brianna died, Robinson said, no one from the club, including

Generali, called her to apologize; his recent claims about her death affecting his criminal activity are a slap in the face.

"For them not to even say I'm sorry, you know? How are you doing? Not even send me a postcard or anything. To blame it all on Brianna is horrible," she said. "I would like a public apology from him and for him to just accept the fact that he's wrong."

Robinson said she wants changes at the club to prevent future tragedies.

Nastri said staff was advised that Brianna couldn't swim. She was one of 35 children who were being watched by one staff member who was dressed in street clothes, she said.

"The lifeguard, I use the term loosely, never knew that Brianna went under the water and was actually alerted to this by a boy who was swimming in the pool," she said. "What she did was instruct one of the other boys to pull Brianna's body to the pool deck."

Generali was deposed as the civil suit progressed, she said, but he testified that the club never changed its policies or procedures after Brianna's death. She said Generali also was unaware of many of the circumstances surrounding Brianna's death, "which, as the executive director, I found shocking and somewhat terrifying."

The suit against the club is still pending, but a settlement offer of \$4 million was made and rejected in 2010.

An attorney representing the club did not return a call seeking comment. It's unclear how much prison time Generali will receive when he's sentenced Oct. 5.