

<https://www.law.com/ctlawtribune/2021/05/12/wrongful-death-lawsuit-new-haven-ignored-housing-compliance-rules-in-fire-that-killed-man/?kw=Wrongful%20Death%20Lawsuit:%20New%20Haven%20Allowed%20Code%20Violations,%20Leading%20to%20Fatal%20Fire>

# Connecticut **LawTribune**

## Wrongful Death Lawsuit: New Haven Allowed Code Violations, Leading to Fatal Fire

Plaintiff counsel for the estate of Michael Randall Sr, - who was killed in a 2019 fire in a New Haven rooming house - claims the city knew the rooming house was not up to code and that Randall should have been told to relocate.

By **Robert Storace**

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New Haven City Hall. Photo: Google

A wrongful death lawsuit filed against the city of New Haven following the death of a rooming house resident in a 2019 fire has a message in it for attorneys representing municipalities in the state.

An April 27 complaint filed in New Haven Superior Court claims the city was negligent in Michael Randall Sr.'s death, alleging the rooming house was actually an illegal apartment that city officials knew wasn't in compliance with local and state codes. Randall's twin sister, Clarice Elarabi, is the party representing the deceased's estate.

"Attorneys representing municipalities need to make sure that they have an understanding of the obligations that the state fire codes and building codes place on municipal officials and to make sure they are complaint," said plaintiff's attorney Bill Bloss, with Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder in Bridgeport.

In the case of Randall, who was 44, Bloss said Wednesday the New Haven Fire Department received a complaint that 150 West St. was being used as an illegal rooming house three months prior to the deadly fire.

The lawsuit says the city contacted owner John Farrar soon after the complaint was made and was told the violations would be fixed the next day. Bloss said there is no evidence the city followed up to ensure the violations were remedied.

Bloss said there were numerous violations, including misuse of the building's space.

Bloss said Randall and Corey Reed, who both died in the fire, lived on the third floor in what was essentially an attic. But, Bloss said, no one should

have been allowed to live on that floor. He said Randall and Reed both should have been relocated.

“The building code requires at least two ways to exit, but the third floor had only one and that was the way of the fire,” Bloss said.

In addition, Bloss alleges, the property—which has since been condemned—had no smoke detectors and no centrally wired fire alarm. Rooming houses also must have fireproofing, and this particular property did not, Bloss said.

“It needed fireproofing construction material that would resist burning quickly,” he said.

The cause of the fire, which began in the second floor kitchen, has not been determined, Bloss said. At least 10 people lived in the three-floor structure, he added.

The lawsuit for the estate seeks unspecified monetary damages.

Bloss says he made two unsuccessful Freedom of Information requests—in August 2019 and then again in July 2020—to the city asking for all of the building department’s records related to the inspections of properties.

“They ignored repeated requests,” Bloss said, noting the matter is now pending with the Freedom of Information Commission.

Representing the city is New Haven Corporation Counsel Patricia King.

King confirmed Wednesday that the city has received the complaint but had no further comment on the pending litigation.

Building owner Farrar could not be reached at press time.