

Family Sues Dignity Health for Concealing Patient's Death, Harvesting Organs and Hiding Body

California Authorities and Family search for "missing" woman. Her body was "found" seven months later in Sacramento morgue warehouse contracted by Dignity.

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Dignity is acutely aware of its continued illegal acts, denying patients a dignified death and leaving their patients' families to scour the streets for their "missing" loved ones.”

Attorney, Rachel Fiset

firm [ZFZ Law](#) filed a lawsuit on Tuesday, April 15, 2025, against Dignity Health and its parent company, CommonSpirit Health, and Mortuary Support Services of Northern California (MSSNC) and its owner, on behalf of a California family whose family member was “missing” for seven months after dying in Sacramento’s Mercy General Hospital (a Dignity Health hospital). Emilliano Walker, et al., v CommonSpirit Health, Dignity Health, et al (Case No. 25CV009026). The family is alleging intentional infliction of emotional distress and gross negligence, among other things, as a result of Dignity Health’s actions.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case; it is part of a broader, disturbing pattern involving at least 60 patients, likely more, whose bodies have gone “missing” for months and sometimes years after dying at Dignity’s hospitals.

On November 2, 2023, Tonya Walker passed away while under the care of Mercy General Hospital. Although the hospital knew Ms. Walker’s name and address and had an emergency contact, they did not inform her family that she had been admitted to the hospital and had died. Moreover, and critical to the concealment of her remains, Dignity Health and MSSNC violated its post-death legal obligations, including preparing a death certificate and getting a permit to hold her body and transport it off-site. These actions would have alerted local authorities of her death and prevented a missing person’s search. Instead, they illegally transported her body to a local mortuary warehouse, where it remained unaccounted for, improperly stored, and decomposing for the next seven months.

During those seven months, Ms. Walker’s family searched tirelessly for their “missing” sister, daughter, and mother alongside the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office. They spent countless hours scouring the streets of Sacramento, posting thousands of flyers, and even offering a

reward for information about her whereabouts. The family faced numerous false leads and distressing messages, including pictures of body bags, random demands and hoaxes claiming that Ms. Walker was being held hostage. Despite the emotional turmoil, the family never gave up hope and continued their search. On May 31, 2024, the family finally learned that Ms. Walker had died in the hospital and that her body was being held at a local mortuary warehouse operated by MSSNC. The lawsuit alleges that the family's exhausting search ultimately culminated in the horrifying experience of viewing her unrecognizable, decomposing body and the shocking revelation that Dignity had harvested her organs without authorization.

Ms. Walker's family soon discovered their tragedy was not unique. For at least five years, Dignity Health has engaged in a pervasive and disturbing pattern of failing to fulfill its essential post-death legal responsibilities, including creating death certificates, obtaining proper permits, and informing families and authorities of deaths. Many families have been left unaware of their loved ones' deaths for months or even years, as the families' undertake desperate searches for those they believed were missing but were actually placed in storage by Dignity Health. This troubling trend was highlighted in 2022 and 2024 through multiple governmental audits, which revealed significant failures by Dignity and resulted in Corrective Action Plans. To date, however, Dignity Health has not complied with these Corrective Action Plans and continues its inhumane practices.

"Dignity is acting without basic regard for its patients and their families. It is acutely aware of its continued illegal acts denying patients a dignified death and leaving its patients' families to scour the streets for their "missing" loved ones," said attorney [Rachel Fiset](#). "Dignity and CommonSpirit make up the second largest non-profit hospital chain in the country. Last year, it reported revenues of \$37 billion and paid its CEO nearly \$30 million. There is no excuse. They have a legal and moral responsibility to do what's right. They must be held accountable."

About ZFZ Law

ZFZ Law is a nationally recognized law firm with an unrivaled team of trial lawyers and a proven track record of success. Attorneys include former federal prosecutors, veterans of the nation's most prestigious law firms, and law clerks to federal district and appellate judges. From their offices in downtown Los Angeles, they have litigated hundreds of cases and have decades of experience achieving remarkable results for their clients. ZFZ's complex civil practice includes favorable settlements and verdicts in wide-ranging matters relating to government agencies, utility and energy companies, healthcare, telecommunications, social media, entertainment, government contracting, and finance. ZFZ's award-winning attorneys have been named top leaders in law by the Los Angeles Business Journal, the Daily Journal, Super Lawyers and U.S. News and World Report. ZFZ is currently recognized by Chambers USA and the Daily Journal as a top litigation firm. ZFZ's attorneys often offer legal expertise and analysis in major publications and news outlets worldwide, including CBS, BBC, CNN, NewsNation, The New York Times, Washington Post, and NBC.

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