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## **Woman severely burned in deadly propane gas explosion files \$25M lawsuit against landlord, management company**

NORFOLK, VA — June 13, 2022: A \$25 million lawsuit has been filed on behalf of a woman who was severely burned when a propane gas leak caused an explosion at her apartment in April. The lawsuit names as defendants the owner and management company of the Berkley Court Apartments, a 75-unit apartment complex, in Franklin, Virginia. The explosion and resulting fire also caused the death of a man who was also a resident in the neighboring duplex apartment in the complex.

The blast occurred on April 15, 2022, around 10:50 pm at the Berkley Court Apartments complex in Franklin, Virginia at the rental units located at 740 and 742 Cameron Street. The duplex was destroyed.

Berkley Court Apartments' resident, Ms. Dionne Whitehead, was at home when the explosion tore through her building. She suffered catastrophic injuries, including massive burns, after the blast resulted in a fire in her home.

Her duplex neighbor sustained critical injuries from the explosion and died two weeks later.

Represented by Norfolk-based personal injury law firm Cooper Hurley Injury Lawyers, Ms. Whitehead is now suing the owner and management company of Berkley Court Apartments Complex for compensatory damages.

In a lawsuit filed by her legal team this morning, Ms. Whitehead alleges that Berkley Court Apartments, L.P. and Severn Management of Virginia, LLC failed to properly maintain, inspect, repair, or warn residents about a dangerous gas leak at the premises despite previous complaints to their employees of a propane gas smell at the property.

The lawsuit further alleges that the owner and management company either knew that the dangerous condition posed an immediate hazard to its residents, or they should have known about the issue, as part of their duty to safely maintain the premises.

This negligence directly led to the explosion which caused Ms. Whitehead's catastrophic injuries, her lawsuit claims. Among those injuries are severe burns to her body and face with permanent injuries expected, including scars and disfigurement.

Ms. Whitehead's legal team, spearheaded by injury attorneys John Cooper, Griffin O'Hanlon, and Bailey Gifford, are seeking to get Ms. Whitehead compensation for her injuries, medical bills, pain and suffering, and future health care costs, along with other claimed damages. They are also in the process of investigating the complaints to the owner and property management company about potential propane leaks or the presence of a propane smell at the apartment complex.

Anyone with information and/or knowledge about propane gas leaks at Berkley Court Apartments is asked to please call Griffin O'Hanlon at (757) 333-3333.

#### About Cooper Hurley Injury Lawyers

Cooper Hurley Injury Lawyers helps those who have been seriously injured through no fault of their own across Virginia. The personal injury firm also represents family members of wrongful death victims. For more information, call 757-333-3333 or visit [www.cooperhurley.com](http://www.cooperhurley.com).

VIRGINIA: IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE COUNTY OF SOUTHAMPTON

DIONNE WHITEHEAD

Plaintiff,

v.

AT LAW NO.:

BERKLEY COURT APARTMENTS, L.P.

SERVE: Loretta Artis Batten, Registered Agent  
100 E 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Franklin, VA 23851

and

SEVERN MANAGEMENT OF VIRGINIA, LLC

SERVE: Incorp Services, Inc., Registered Agent  
7288 Hanover Green Drive  
Mechanicsville, VA 23111

Defendants.

**COMPLAINT**

COMES NOW, Plaintiff, by counsel, and for her Complaint, states as follows,  
and seeks judgment, jointly and severally, against the Defendants in the amount listed  
below:

1. On or about April 15, 2022, at about 10:50 p.m., the Plaintiff was in her  
home located at 742 Cameron Street, Franklin, VA 23851, in the Berkley Court  
Apartments complex, "the complex" or "the premises," when a propane gas explosion  
in the adjacent duplex, at 740 Cameron Street, Franklin, VA 23851, resulted in a fire in  
Plaintiff's home, causing catastrophic injuries to Plaintiff, including massive burns.

2. Defendant Berkley Court Apartments, L.P. (hereinafter "Berkley Court  
Apartments") is a Virginia limited partnership and the owner of the apartment complex,

including the units at 740 and 742 Cameron Street. Berkley Court Apartments at all relevant times was the landlord of Plaintiff and of the renter in the unit at 740 Cameron Street.

3. Defendant Severn Management of Virginia, LLC (hereinafter "Severn") is a Maryland limited liability company that is authorized to transact business in Virginia and had agreed to provide management of the premises and assumed duties of the owner/landlord, including for common areas like the propane gas system serving the complex.

4. Defendants, at all relevant times, owned, occupied, operated, leased, and/or managed the premises.

5. Defendants, their agents, and employees had a duty to maintain the premises in a reasonably safe condition, to make reasonable inspections to determine whether any unsafe conditions existed, to fix any dangerous conditions they know of, or should have known of, and to warn residents and tenants of any unsafe conditions known to Defendants or which should have been known to them.

6. Defendants owed a duty to Plaintiff, and to the members of the public lawfully on the premises, to exercise reasonable care to keep and maintain the premises, including common areas and shared utilities, in a reasonably safe condition, as well as the above-mentioned duties to inspect, fix, and warn which duties arise under the common law and/or statutes, including Virginia Code §55.1-1200 *et seq.*, commonly known as the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act.

7. Despite Defendants' aforesaid duties, and in violation of each of them, Defendants negligently failed to properly maintain, failed to adequately inspect, failed

to repair, and failed to warn about a dangerous condition at the premises. Specifically, the propane gas system at the premises was controlled by the Defendants and used by all of the tenants for hot water. An unsafe condition with the propane gas system, likely a gas leak, directly led to the explosion on April 15, 2022, in the unit at 740 Cameron Street. The smell of propane at the premises was reported to the Defendants' employees and agents prior to the explosion; however, Defendants failed to properly address the safety concern.

8. The dangerous condition was further such that the Defendants knew, or in the exercise of ordinary and reasonable care should have known, that the dangerous condition of the propane gas system posed an immediate hazard to residents of the premises. Said condition was created by and/or permitted to exist uncorrected by the Defendants who could foresee catastrophic harm to residents.

9. At said time and place, as a direct and proximate result of the Defendants' aforementioned negligence and breaches of duty, the Plaintiff was horribly injured when her home caught on fire due to the propane gas explosion at the premises in the adjacent unit. Plaintiff sustained severe burns to her body as a direct result of the explosion and fire.

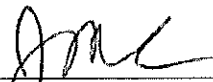
10. On April 15, 2022, as a proximate result of the negligence aforementioned, Plaintiff was caused to sustain serious injuries; has suffered and will continue to suffer great pain of body and mind; has sustained permanent injury; has suffered and will suffer embarrassment and harm from scars, disfigurement, and deformity; has suffered and will continue to suffer mental anguish, inconvenience, and other quality of life losses; has suffered and will suffer loss of earnings and loss of

earning capacity; has been and will be prevented from doing and enjoying her work and personal activities; and has incurred and will continue to incur medical bills and other health care costs, in an effort to treat said injuries, together with other economic and consequential damages allowed in Virginia.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment against the Defendants, jointly and severally, in the amount of TWENTY FIVE MILLION DOLLARS (\$25,000,000.00) as compensatory damages plus interest from the date of the injury until paid, plus her costs in this matter expended.

PLAINTIFF HEREBY DEMANDS TRIAL BY JURY.

DIONNE WHITEHEAD

By:   
Counsel

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