

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUSTIN, TEXAS—

FAMILY OF CILE STEWARD FILES WRONGFUL DEATH LAWSUIT AGAINST CAMP MYSTIC

Attorneys from Nix Patterson filed suit on behalf of Will and Cici Steward, parents of Cecilia “Cile” Steward, the only child still missing from the Camp Mystic flood. The Stewards filed their wrongful death lawsuit in Travis County, joining dozens of other families in seeking accountability for the loss of their precious daughters. The family is also seeking a Temporary Restraining Order from the court to enjoin the camp from reopening until the investigations have ceased.

The Steward family is hoping this suit brings awareness to the Eastlands’ failures and continued lack of accountability for their actions that caused the horrific events of July 4th. The lawsuit alleges a disturbing pattern of Camp Mystic avoiding regulation and oversight which ultimately led to this tragedy.

Quote from Parents, Will & CiCi Steward:

“We are eternally grateful to Governor Abbott and Lt. Gov. Patrick and the EOC who have all tirelessly maintained their commitment to bringing our baby girl home. Cile was taken from us 7 months ago and while we recognize this lawsuit will not bring her back, we feel compelled to ensure the truth of Camp Mystic’s failures are exposed.”

“There were heroes on July 4th at Camp Mystic but their names were not Eastland. The real heroes were the counselors who bravely navigated chaos to save themselves and their campers.”

Quotes from Nix Patterson Attorney Brad Beckworth:

“There is no greater transfer of trust than the one that occurs when a parent hands the care of her child over to another person. That is what Will and CiCi did when they sent Cile to Camp Mystic

on June 29th. The Eastlands promised to take care of her, teach her and keep her safe. They broke that promise in every conceivable way 5 days later.”

The Eastlands are responsible for Cile’s death. They have fought oversight, regulation and responsibility at every turn. They’ve known their cabins are in a deadly flood zone for 100 years. They knew something like this could happen. But they always chose to put profits and property over children and safety. That’s why when the NWS told them Camp Mystic was in a life threatening situation and to move to higher ground at 1:14 a.m., the only thing the Eastlands chose to do over the next hour was to move their canoes to higher ground. While the Eastlands saved their precious property, they ordered Cile and her friends to stay in their cabins until it was too late to evacuate. That order was a death sentence.”

Quotes from Nix Patterson Attorney Christina Yarnell:

“Whenever a mass casualty event like this occurs, you must carefully evaluate those in charge to understand what happened and find out who is responsible. We’ve done that. It’s very clear the Eastland’s caused this tragedy. Everything they did from July 2nd through July 4th was wrong.”

Quote from Blair Townsend:

“The Eastlands were warned about flooding at Camp Mystic for nearly 100 years. Then they were warned again for three straight days. They did nothing to prepare except move canoes to higher ground. Twice. They did not move the children. It doesn't matter whether the water was five feet high or twenty-five feet high. They were unprepared for any flood. No evacuation plan. No training. No warning to campers or their counselors. When the water began to rise, they did nothing for hours while children slept. When they finally decided to act, the Eastlands have admitted they were improvising and had no plan. You don't improvise with children's lives. By the time Camp Mystic took action, it was too late.”

Top Ten Takeaways From The Petition:

When the evidence about what happened here is presented to a jury, several things will be made very clear to every parent and decision-maker in this State:

(1) Cile’s tragic death at Camp Mystic was entirely preventable. Texas law required the Eastlands to have an evacuation plan and gathering site. It also required them to train every counselor, camper and staff member. And have written documentation of each staff member’s assignments in an evacuation. The Eastlands had no plan. The Eastlands admit in the NYT article that they were IMPROVISING and HAD NO PLAN BUT WILL IN FUTURE.

(2) The Eastlands are to blame. They received warnings on July 2 and 3rd. These warnings told them to prepare for a possible flood. They were told at 1:14 a.m. that there was a Flash Flood Warning. The Eastlands moved canoes (a second time) after getting this warning. They never told Cile or any staff member/counselor. They stayed in the office. Every possible evacuation route was still open at 1:14 a.m.

(3) This was not an unprecedented flood. It was in fact, PRECEDENTED. Dick Eastland was on the Upper Guadalupe River Authority Board. The UGRA told him the County didn't have the necessary warning systems and infrastructure. And that a flood different than the 100/500 year definitions was likely in the near future/next 1-3 years. Despite that knowledge, Mystic did nothing to prepare or install any infrastructure. They never adopted an evacuation plan. They spent no money to buy warning systems, cabins had no walkie talkies as promised, nor battery powered radios or a generator. They could have put a communication bundle in every cabin for \$100. They wouldn't spend the money. But they did build and improve huge homes for themselves on the property—all of which had a second story.

(4) Defendants claim this flood was unforeseeable and a magnitude beyond comprehension. Not true. The Eastlands knew Camp Mystic had decades of previous flooding history. They celebrated the 1932 flood every year on trivia night. Cabins got swept downstream that day. The 1978 flood required an evacuation of several cabins. The 1987 flood killed campers at Pot of Gold. Senior Hill floods so often it's part of the camp folklore. The truth is, the Eastlands were not ready for any flood. Whether it was 5 feet or 25 feet, the Eastlands had no plan for a flood of any significance.

(5) FLASH FLOOD WATCH ISSUED AT 1:14 AM. — TDEM and NWS WARNED THEM THIS WAS COMING. The Eastlands missed multiple opportunities to prepare. Weather forecasters repeatedly said the storm will stall over Hunt Thursday night into early Friday morning. Camp Mystic now says the 1:14 a.m warning just said it was raining. That's false. The Warning had a "considerable threat" tag which is the second highest threat the NWS issues. It said life threatening human conditions were present. And to move to higher ground immediately. The Eastlands did none of these things.

(6) They Eastland's trapped Cile in her cabin. They cut her off from any communication with the outside world. Campers and Counselors had no communication devices, no phones or tablets. They were entirely dependent on the Eastlands to tell them they were in danger. The Eastlands told no campers or counselors that the Camp was under a flood watch for two days. They had no weather radios or walkie talkies. The first time any camper or counselor learned there might be a flash flood was during the flood. The Eastlands promised they'd use the loudspeakers to warn them or give instructions. They never gave any instructions.

(7) The Eastlands' only plan was to shelter in place. This plan was in a seven-sentence paragraph posted in every cabin. It told every camper and counselor they should stay in their cabins because they were safe and on high-ground. That was false. When the flood was happening, the only instructions Cile or her counselor got were when Edward yelled from outside to stay in the cabin until the water was too high. That order was a death sentence. It defied every policy and guideline every federal and state agency provides for flood emergencies.

(8) It will never be safe to operate a camp with cabins at the Camp Mystic Guadalupe River site. Eastlands should ever be allowed to operate a camp or have any supervisory authority over the care of children again; Despite the Eastlands claiming Cypress Lake is a totally different camp,

nothing could be farther from the truth. They share the same camp license and same land and most importantly, the same reckless leadership.

(9) The Eastlands claim they evacuated 166 girls. That's a lie. The Eastlands evacuated 3 cabins. Everyone else was on their own. 27 girls did not survive. More than 30 fled up the hill to Sky High on their own. The rest defied orders and self-evacuated. It's a miracle anyone survived in Rec Hall. The huddled on the second-floor deck and the water came to their feet.

(10) Counselors are the real heroes. Many of them defied the Eastlands' orders. But for the courage and quick thinking of the counselors in Bubble, Twins I and Twin II no one would have survived from those cabins.

About Nix Patterson

Nix Patterson, LLP, headquartered in Austin, Texas, is one of the nation's leading firms representing individuals and businesses in contingent fee litigation, crisis management and consulting. The firm has achieved record-setting verdicts and settlements for clients totaling over \$25 billion.

Since its founding in 1985, Nix Patterson has remained committed to the belief that everyone deserves access to a good lawyer and a fair trial. The firm continues to fight for victims and their families in cases nationwide.

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