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Family Warns Others After Midwife Tragedy

By Brian Johnson



"This is a very hollow victory because the family never got the satisfaction of hearing a jury say, 'What you did was wrong and what you did caused the baby's death,'" said Brian McKeen, the Snyder's lawyer.

The family lost their son because of what they describe was midwife malpractice. Sara and Jarad Snyder sued the Greenhouse Birth Center after a bad delivery in 2012. Their baby Magnus was born breached; he got stuck and suffocated.

Judge Clinton Canady, III of the Ingham County Circuit Court gave the decision on May 8. There was no jury, no trial, just a default decision because the defendant, Clarice Winkler who was in charge of Greenhouse failed to appear in court.

The Snyders were awarded \$5 million, but it's unlikely they'll ever see any of that money.

"It's very painful to see this catastrophic fatal injury that they caused and then you turn around and they can't even come forth and defend the case," said McKeen. "There is something that is very outrageous about that."

Winkler said Greenhouse closed in September of 2012. It's now an empty building. News Ten's Brian Johnson spoke with her on the phone. She said it's an extremely sad situation for everyone involved.

"There should be some amount of regulation and oversight, and most families are unaware that there's not, and how that impacts their safety," said Sara Snyder, Magnus' mother. She hopes expectant mothers can learn from her experience and realize before hand what they are signing up for.

"People have to realize that number one, there is an issue with safety in delivering babies at these outpatient-so-called birth centers. There is a real question about the safety of the mother and safety of the baby," said McKeen. "Number two, heaven forbid if something does go wrong, there will not be the financial wherewithall or resources to pay compensation to the baby in the event of an injury or to the family in the event of a death."

Snyder says she thought the birthing center would be safe like a hospital, and comfortable like a home. She said that's not the case and the judgment speaks volumes about negligence.

"Midwife means many things, and in the out-of-hospital-birth world you have to be very careful about who you hire because there is no regulation," said Snyder. "Pretty much anybody can call themselves a midwife or practice opening a birth center without any sort of licensing [or] insurance."

Snyder said it's very different from a hospital.

She said the other four employees who worked at Greenhouse are still employed, helping deliver babies. Instead of working at Greenhouse, they now work at Willow Tree Family in Lansing.

"Women need to know that there are grave dangers associated with delivering babies anywhere other than in a hospital," said McKeen. "I think it's abhorrent that someone can say they are a birthing center and not have the resources that are necessary to safely deliver a baby."

The Snyder case is the second he has seen with similar circumstance. He does not want a third.

"We're talking about a very serious issue of women's health and the health of newborn babies," said McKeen. "Nothing can be more important and yet we don't seem to care in this state about doing something to regulate unqualified, direct-entry midwives with no real training from providing care even in high risk situations."

Over the last two years, despite all the attention this case has gotten, no state laws have changed. Birthing centers are still not licensed, regulated, or required to have insurance in case something goes wrong.