

Family files lawsuit against TSA for violent arrest of teenage cancer patient

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Last week the family of Hannah Cohen filed charges against the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for injuring their daughter, a disabled cancer patient who was 18 at the time of the incident. A violent arrest last year at the Memphis International Airport left Hannah with bruises to her face and bleeding from her head after TSA agents “hit her head on the floor.”

Cohen’s mother, Shirley, told the *Guardian* newspaper that she and Hannah, now 19, were on their way home to Chattanooga, Tennessee on June 30, 2015 after Hannah received a final round of radiation for a brain tumor at the St. Jude’s Children Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee when she set off an alarm upon entering a body scanner at the Memphis International Airport.

Cohen told the *Guardian* that her shirt had decorative sequins sewn onto it. “You could see on the screen what it was pointing out,” her mother Shirley said. TSA agents approached Cohen and told her they needed to take her to a “sterile area” to do an extended search.

“They wanted to do further scanning. She was reluctant, she didn’t understand what they were about to do,” said Shirley. Cohen’s mother pleaded with the agents, “She is a St Jude’s patient, and she can get confused. Please be gentle. If I could just help her, it will make things easier.”

Shirley offered to take the sequined shirt off of Cohen, as she was wearing one underneath but was met with laughter from a female TSA agent. Cohen’s brain tumor had left her partially paralyzed, blind in one eye and deaf in one ear leaving her prone to confusion. “I tried to push away,” said Cohen. “I tried to get away.” At which point a call was made for more agents. “That’s when the armed guards came,” Shirley said.

“She’s trying to get away from them, but in the next

instant, one of them had her down on the ground and hit her head on the floor. There was blood everywhere,” Cohen’s mother reported. “Another guard pushed me back 20 feet, in my butt, and told me I couldn’t be nearby. I felt so helpless. I sat down on a bench facing away so I couldn’t see what they were doing to my daughter.”

According to the *Guardian*, Cohen was taken to a separate room, then to a hospital, and then spent the night in the Shelby County jail. Shirley would not see her daughter until the next day in the jail’s parking lot. “I’m sorry, Mama,” Cohen said as she cried and embraced her mother.

Before returning home—at which point all of their belongings had been shipped back to Chattanooga—Cohen had to appear before a local judge. As she stood before the judge trying to explain the horrendous experience she had just been through, the judge said, “You’re going to have to speak up.” At that point, Hannah revealed the cuts surrounding her blind eye. “The judge’s eyes got big and round,” said Shirley. The judge dropped all charges and proposed they seek legal counsel.

The family has since filed a lawsuit against the TSA and the Memphis-Shelby County airport authority seeking damages for medical expenses and for both physical and emotional sustained injuries and asking for a “reasonable sum not exceeding \$100,000 and costs,” and another undisclosed punitive amount.

Responding in the most brutally cold and bureaucratic fashion to the lawsuit, the TSA commented that “passengers can call ahead of time to learn more about the screening process for their particular needs or medical situation.”

Responding in kind, Shirley told the *Guardian*, “Why should I do that when we’ve been going through that

airport for 17 years? These people think they are God. They think they can do anything they want,” she said. “Well, in this country we have the Americans with Disabilities Act. And if they will do this to a disabled girl, does that mean they’ll do it to an 80-year-old grandmother? It’s time for justice.”



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