Father and four young daughters perish in Watertown, New York, house fire

Steve Filips
19 February 2019

Four children and their father perished in Watertown, New York, after a fire ripped through their home early Thursday morning.

There were six people in the house when firefighters arrived to find the house engulfed and smoke pouring out the windows.

Aaron Bodah, 38, the father of the girls, along with Alexa, 8, and Skylar, 4, were pronounced dead at the scene. Two children, Merissa, 14, and Erin, 6, were found clinging to life upstairs. Despite being rushed to Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse for emergency treatment, they both died later Thursday night.

Only one sister, Hailey, 13, survived the disaster, escaping the burning home to seek help from neighbors.

Bill Bellis told CNY Central that he was startled awake by Hailey's screams for help, "We were awakened by a young child pounding on the door, screaming frantically that there was a fire at her house and that her four sisters and dad were inside." Bellis explained that he rushed to try and help but that it was too late: "I kicked in the front door, but with the super-heated fumes and toxic stuff, I couldn't get in the front door."

In an interview with police, Hailey explained that her father stayed in the house to try to rescue her sisters and had instructed her to run and alert neighbors to call 911.

Hundreds of Watertown residents attended a vigil at the home on Friday. Dorah Bodah, who is Aaron's mother and the girls' grandmother said at the vigil, "They were so happy, they were so loved. I just can't believe he's gone, can't believe they're gone. I don't understand how anything like this can happen."

Hailey Bodah has seen an outpouring of support from the community, and has had a GoFundMe page set up to accept donations for her here.

Fire investigators on Thursday pointed to the area around the kitchen stove as the likely cause of the fire. They also noted that the home's two smoke detectors did not have batteries. The older home's smoke detectors were not directly connected to house's electrical wiring to provide constant power and protection.

WWNY 7 News reported that city records showed that the home's owner was Viola Marcinkowski of Vienna, Virginia. There was a manager who oversaw the property and likely collected rent in behalf of Marcinkowski, but there was no record of the house being registered, averting an inspection to verify safety before it could be utilized as a rental property. As of this writing, no charges have been filed against the property owner or manager.

Not registering a rental is a fraudulent tactic often used by landlords to avoid paying fees and taxes or making costly repairs to bring the house up to the required residential building codes to maintain safety. This raises the critical need for the working class to organize neighborhood action committees that would have ensuring secure housing as a top priority.

Another fire took the lives of three young brothers in Herkimer, New York, on January 11, near Utica. The fire was reported around 6 a.m., and firefighters told local media that the blaze engulfed the older wood-frame home rapidly. The family was all sleeping on the first floor with the boys' parents at the front of the house and the boys toward the back. The parents were awoken by the smoke alarms, but efforts to save their boys were rebuffed by the inferno. The family has chosen to remain anonymous and only the first names of the boys have been released: Jackson, 1, Richard, 6, and Michael, 7. The fire started in the basement and has been blamed on an electrical malfunction.

© World Socialist Web Site

The working class is forced into substandard housing by stagnant or declining wages and rising housing costs, putting their children's and their own lives at risk. Workers are often faced with the tough choices of paying for medical bills and groceries or paying expensive heating bills, with limited public aid programs, to keep warm. In Watertown, 40 percent of children 18 and younger are living in poverty, and in Herkimer the rate is 39.2 percent.

There have been 353 house-fire-related deaths so far this year across the United States, with New York and Pennsylvania marking the highest death tolls, respectively, at 27 and 21.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site