

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Widow Files Lawsuit Against Crown Cremation and Heights Crematory Over Negligence, Gross Mishandling of Human Remains

[Indianapolis, IN – April 29, 2025] A Munster, Indiana widow, Darla Smith, has filed a lawsuit in Lake County Commercial Court alleging negligence, breach of contract and gross mishandling of her late husband's remains. In the complaint filed April 29, Crown Cremation Service in Crown Point, Indiana, and Heights Crematory in Chicago, Illinois, are accused of improperly caring for and storing Darryl Smith's body, along with the bodies of more than 100 other individuals.

Plaintiffs are represented by Gabriel Hawkins, Partner at Indianapolis-based plaintiffs' firm CohenMalad, LLP, and by Chicago-based attorney Scott Yonover.

Darryl and Darla Smith, lifelong residents of Northwest Indiana, met while working as contractors for the United States Postal Service. They were married for 23 years and raised two sons together. Darryl especially enjoyed traveling with his family. His favorite destinations included Arizona, Florida and Las Vegas, Nevada.

After Darryl's death on August 4, 2024, Darla entrusted the final care of her husband's body to Crown Cremation. Among other assurances, she was told that Darryl's remains would be cremated within five to seven days.

This was not the case, however. Upon information and belief, Darryl's body was improperly stored and transported to Illinois for cremation by Crown's subcontractor, Heights Crematory. There, against state and federal regulations, he was held in a non-refrigerated location, left exposed to the elements, and ultimately not cremated until 19 days after his death, on August 23, 2024.

"This was not just a betrayal of trust, but a complete abandonment of basic human decency," said attorney Gabriel Hawkins. "What should have been a solemn act of closure for Darryl Smith's loved ones has instead turned into a nightmare, for them and for over a hundred other families."

In early March 2025, CBS News Chicago journalists Dave Savini and Michele Youngerman reported that bodies were stacked in a (sometimes open) trailer outside Heights' facility. Deceased individuals were wrapped loosely in plastic with body parts exposed – among other concerns, an egregious deviation from the non-leachable containers regulated by law for transport and storage of human remains. Inside Heights, additional illegal atrocities related to the care and storage of remains were also found.



[Read the CBS 2 [March 3, 2025](#) and [March 17, 2025](#) investigative reports.]

Authorities in Illinois and Indiana are actively investigating Heights Crematory and Crown Cremation, and Heights has since been shut down.

The April 29th civil lawsuit cites negligence, breach of contract and gross mishandling of human remains. The complaint asks for damages related to these allegations as well as the emotional distress Darla has experienced and continues to suffer, including serious doubt about the ashes she received from Crown.

"Not only is Darla Smith left to grieve Darryl's death, but also the knowledge that the defendants willfully desecrated his body," said attorney Scott Yonover. "Further, she has no confidence that Crown or Heights truthfully delivered his ashes. She questions daily whether the contents of his urn belong to her husband."

Other families whose loved ones were entrusted to these facilities and have concerns, or any individuals with information relevant to this matter, are encouraged to contact the legal team investigating on behalf of plaintiffs. Call 317.636.6481 or visit cohenmalad.com to request a confidential discussion, including potential legal options.

Attorneys Gabriel Hawkins and Scott Yonover are available for comment.

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