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Steven C. Brigham's patient commits suicide after abortion, family sues

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A Voorhees doctor, under fire from state officials over alleged improper abortions, also faces a legal challenge from a Camden County businessman and political figure.

Dr. Steven C. Brigham is accused of malpractice in a lawsuit filed by **George Zallie Sr.** of Cherry Hill. **Zallie's daughter committed suicide about 15 months after having an abortion in Brigham's facility in July 2001.**

"We lost our youngest child and our first grandchild," Zallie said in an interview this week.

His **lawsuit claims Brigham and his employees did not disclose all relevant facts to his daughter, then a 19-year-old college student who was three to six weeks pregnant. That includes assertions that her fetus was "a complete, separate living human being" and "a second family member."**

The suit also says Brigham and others at the **American Women's Center** did not warn **Stacy Zallie** of the "substantial increased risk of severe emotional trauma and distress" for women who have abortions. It also contends they failed to make sure her decision was voluntary.

Stacy Zallie made at least four suicide attempts after the abortion before dying at age 21 in October 2002, the lawsuit says.

Zallie's attorney, Harold Cassidy of Shrewsbury, Monmouth County, declined to comment on pending litigation. Brigham's lawyer could not be reached.

But an attorney representing Brigham in a separate fight with state officials has denied any wrongdoing by the doctor.

"Everything he did complied with applicable law and was in conformance with accepted standards of medical practice," said Joseph Gorrell of Roseland, Essex County.

Brigham, who earned his medical degree at Columbia University, has run the American Women's Center on Alpha Avenue in Voorhees since 1992.

The Attorney General's Office is seeking to suspend or revoke the New Jersey medical license he's held since 1992. The dispute is to go before the state Board of Medical Examiners on Oct. 13.

Officials contend Brigham broke medical rules and jeopardized patients by providing abortions to women who were more than 14 weeks pregnant. The state asserts Brigham's Voorhees office and his qualifications do not meet the standards required for late-term abortions.

The state's complaint says Brigham would start abortions at his Voorhees facility, then have patients be driven to a facility in Elkton, Md., to complete the process. The state learned of the two-state process after one of Brigham's patients needed emergency surgery due to a serious medical complication at the Elkton site.

Zallie said his lawsuit, filed in 2004, is expected to go to trial in March in Superior Court in Camden.

Zallie, a second-generation grocer who runs 10 ShopRite stores in South Jersey and Pennsylvania, is a Republican freeholder candidate in Camden County. **He said he did not learn of his daughter's abortion until after her death. His lawsuit asserts the defendants' negligence caused Stacy Zallie to become "despondent and depressed."**

"I think abortion clinics should be compelled to have a mental-health professional on staff," said Zallie, who since 2003 has run a foundation that seeks to help women who've had abortions. "They (clinics) should screen women for depression pre- and post-abortion."

Zallie also thinks many people, including medical and mental-health professionals, overlook or minimize the risk of emotional trauma from abortions.

"I would like independent psychological professionals from both sides to debate the issue in an open and honest way," he said. "The most frustrating thing is to find someone without a red jersey or a blue jersey. I want to find someone in a black-and-white striped shirt."

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