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Grieving Family Calls For Club Soma Closure

by Jennifer Manley, Assistant Editor

The family of Antonios Fasarakis, the 19 year old who was killed last month outside an Astoria club after an altercation with a bouncer, are looking for justice.

They joined Assemblyman Michael Gianaris (D Astoria) last week in calls to shut down the club, and in support of stricter regulations for bouncers across the city. The family's attorney also announced their intentions to sue the club, the security company that hired the bouncer, and the city.

"I just wish that there's justice," said Fasarakis' sister, Christina, at a press conference last Thursday. "We would not want any other person to feel the loss that we're feeling right now."

Christina was joined by her parents, Melody and George, her brother, Bill, and her aunt, Toula Gournelos.

Gianaris is calling on the city to shut down the 25th Avenue nightspot, which he said had been cited at least twice in its single year of operation for allowing underage drinking. "How many tragedies must occur before we get serious about regulating nightclubs?" Gianaris asked.

He promised to introduce state legislation that will regulate security companies, that hire bouncers, requiring background checks and mandatory training.

Accounts of the encounter between Fasarakis and the man working the door, Francisco Solivan, vary.

According to statements given during Solivan's arraignment in Queens Criminal Court, Fasarakis threatened Solivan with a blunt object, which has been described as a metal pipe or flashlight. By his own admission, Solivan then threw the punch that caused Fasarakis to fall to the pavement and hit his head.

But according to Rosemarie Arnold, the family's attorney, the bouncer's account is unreliable. According to her witnesses—including Fasarakis' two companions that evening—Fasarakis was not holding any weapon when Solivan punched him. She added that Solivan initially fled the scene and no weapon has been found. "Antonios Fasarakis was not the aggressor," she said.

The capacity in which Solivan was working at the club that night remains unclear as well. He was not licensed as a bouncer as required by state law and initial reports indicated that he was working as a fire evacuation coordinator.

The club has disavowed responsibility for his behavior, noting that he was not a club employee, but rather was hired by Styles Security, a Manhattan based firm.

Neither the club owners nor the security company returned calls for comment by press time. However, club owner Jimmy Orsaris told the National Herald Express that Club Soma had "absolutely nothing to do with this unfortunate incident." Orsaris also noted that the incident took place a block from club property.

The family is also filing suit against the security company, and intends to file a notice of claim against the city as well. "The city knew this place was operating and serving minors," Arnold said.

The incident has continued to fuel concerns—brought into the limelight in part by the Imette St. Guillen case—that stronger regulations on bouncers are needed.

At the city level, Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D Astoria) and Speaker Christine Quinn are working on legislation that would allow the city to more easily shut down bars that employ unlicensed bouncers.

The legislation would also require bars and clubs to prominently display those licenses to the public.

Solivan, who has a history of assault charges, was arraigned last week on third degree assault charges, although the charges may be raised to manslaughter by a grand jury, which will weigh all the evidence.

According to witnesses, Solivan was bigger than Fasarakis. Arnold also noted that many Styles security guards are trained in martial arts. She couldn't say for certain if Solivan was, but added, "obviously, he handled the situation improperly."

Fasarakis' parents, who live in Astoria, did not speak at the news conference, but his sister recalled Antonios as a bright spot in their lives. "He always made me laugh, always smiling, he was a happy kid."

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