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Wheelchair Accident at St. Thomas Airport Leads to Lawsuit Against Spirit Airlines

Couple seeks justice after serious injuries sustained in fall from airline lift

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Major U.S. carriers, including Spirit Airlines, at the Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

A civil suit filed against Spirit Airlines for negligence has been moved from the V.I. Superior Court to the District Court of the Virgin Islands on Monday. The plaintiffs, Elisha and Sylvia Frazer, who require wheelchair services to board flights, allege that they were placed on an overloaded lift operated by Worldwide Flight Services (also named as a defendant in the suit). Elisha's wheelchair reportedly rolled backwards off the lift, falling over 12 feet onto the tarmac and causing serious injuries.

According to the recitation of events laid out in the suit, the husband and wife were at the Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas on December 22, 2023, awaiting a flight to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. They were directed to the lift so as to board the plane, and noted that it was clearly marked with a not-to-exceed capacity of 1000 pounds.

However, they said that there were six people aboard the lift – four in wheelchairs and two attendants – who altogether exceeded the lift’s stated carrying capacity. The allegedly overloaded lift was then raised to the height of the plane door, and the door opened. That was when it was reportedly discovered that Mr. Frazer’s wheelchair had not been properly parked. He rolled backwards off the lift and fell the over 12-foot distance to the tarmac below. As a result of the fall, Mr. Frazer is said to have suffered “life-threatening physical injuries, medical expenses, economic losses, mental anguish, pain and suffering, and loss of enjoyment of life.”

His wife Sylvia, the lawsuit claims, was forced to watch her husband on the ground in pain and agony while workers refused to allow her to stay by his side, demanding that she instead board the plane. It took a reported 45 minutes before she was allowed to deplane so that she could stay with her husband. Mrs. Frazer is also alleged to have suffered physical injury as a result of this ordeal, as well as mental anguish and suffering, among other ill effects.

The lawsuit alleges gross negligence on the part of Spirit and Worldwide Flight Services, a ground handling company based in New York. Both defendants are further accused of intentionally inflicting emotional distress on Mrs. Frazer. The lawsuit seeks compensatory and punitive damages to be assessed by the court.