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Michigan Couple Sues Ritz-Carlton After Alleged \$425,000 Armed Robbery on St. Thomas

Lawsuit alleges over \$425,000 in jewelry and luxury items were stolen and that Samuel Sullivan was pistol-whipped and left with “excruciating pain and a pronounced black eye,” while claiming the unnamed security guard had prior firearm-related charges.

Legal / **Published On February 25, 2026 07:13 AM /**

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The Ritz Carlton lobby building.

A Michigan couple who say they were robbed at gunpoint during a stay at The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas last September have filed a civil lawsuit in District Court, alleging negligence and gross negligence in connection with the incident.

According to the complaint filed Tuesday, Samuel Sullivan and Shayaria Gilmore traveled to the U.S. Virgin Islands for a stay at the resort. One night during their visit, the couple returned to the hotel in the early morning hours and went to the lobby area to await transportation to their assigned guest room.

A member of the hotel's security team transported them to the building where they were staying. Upon arrival, the pair realized they did not have their room key. The complaint states that Mr. Sullivan specifically asked the security guard not to leave them alone. The guard, however, departed to obtain a replacement key.

"Within seconds of the security guard's departure, multiple armed assailants emerged from nearby bushes in the immediate vicinity of the Plaintiffs' building and robbed Plaintiffs at gunpoint," the lawsuit alleges.

The complaint states that the assailants stole custom jewelry, a luxury watch, a designer bag, and other items with a combined appraised value exceeding \$425,000. Mr. Sullivan also alleges that he was pistol-whipped during the robbery and suffered "excruciating pain and a pronounced black eye."

Police responded to a 911 call within minutes. According to the complaint, responding officers observed "the fence line between the hotel and the neighboring condominium property included a gate that appeared unsecured, providing an access point near the location of the robbery."

The lawsuit further alleges that after the incident, the plaintiffs learned that the security guard involved — who is not named in the complaint — had a criminal history that included charges of unauthorized use of a firearm during the commission of a crime of violence.

The complaint accuses The Ritz-Carlton of common law negligence. It notes that the resort's layout requires "late-night transport of guests from the lobby to distant guest room buildings." The area surrounding the building assigned to Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Gilmore allegedly "included conditions conducive to concealment and sudden attack," according to the filing.

The complaint cites dim nighttime lighting, vegetation near pedestrian routes and building approaches, and perimeter gates that appeared unsecured and unmonitored. These conditions, the plaintiffs argue, should have been recognized by the property as posing "an unreasonable risk of violent third-party crime unless appropriate security measures were implemented and enforced."

The lawsuit further asserts that previous "internal incident reports, guest and staff complaints, security logs, work orders, and communications with law enforcement" provided the hotel with prior notice of similar risks.

In addition to common law negligence, the plaintiffs allege gross negligence in the hiring and placement of the security guard. The complaint states that the guard was placed in a role that "included discretionary responsibility for guest escort and access assistance during overnight hours," despite what the plaintiffs describe as a significant criminal history that proper vetting and background checks may have uncovered. The case remains pending in District Court.