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EXCLUSIVE Washington DC family lose custody of their autistic son, 16, after refusing to let him transition to a girl

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By **LUKE ANDREWS SENIOR HEALTH REPORTER FOR DAILYMAIL.COM**

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A military family who lost custody of their autistic son after they refused to transition his gender are suing a major DC hospital.

The family said their boy had never shown any desire to become a girl until, at 16, he was hospitalized for self-harming after a bitter breakup with his girlfriend in 2021.

Staff at Children's National Hospital informed the family that he wanted to be female and should be referred to using she/her pronouns going forward, the suit claims.

His army veteran parents, from Prince George County in Maryland, rejected the suggestion, saying their son was 'impressionable' due to being autistic.

They have accused the hospital of starting a 'full-on campaign to transgender this child' and accused staff of 'mental re-programming', saying their son had been forced to write letters to friends disavowing his previous male identity.



Above is a picture that the family shared with DailyMail.com on condition of anonymity. The eldest son is shown on the far left, with his mother's arm wrapped around him in a loving embrace. Everyone is smiling and happy in the picture, after the second son had graduated

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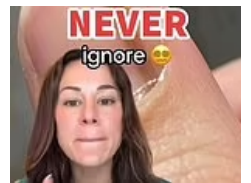
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Pictured above is Children's National Hospital in Washington DC, which is where the boy was treated and then transferred to Child Protection Services

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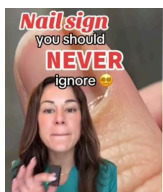
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According to the lawsuit, the hospital used its emergency policies to keep the boy in its units and reported the parents to child protection services.

The boy was then moved into foster care and hasn't been back to the family home since. What followed has been a two-year legal battle for custody over the teen, who is now 19 and remains in foster care.

The parents, who are in their 40s and African-American, say their son was at risk because his condition means he is vulnerable to social manipulation.

They have spoken exclusively to DailyMail.com but want to remain anonymous to protect their estranged son's privacy.

The boy's father revealed how they had to sell their thriving business and four-bedroom family home to cover legal costs.

The father said: 'This has been devastating. It drained so much money, there is no money left.'

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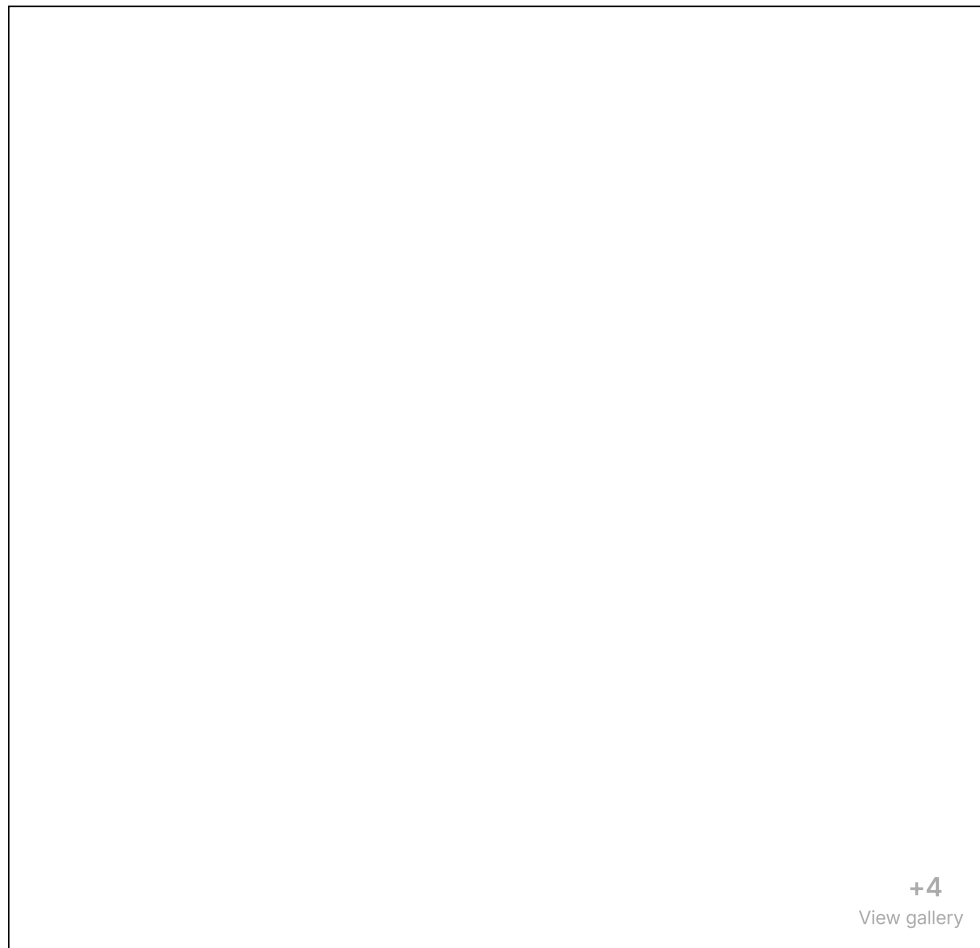
'It changed our entire way of life, with the loss of a child and then with the loss of our income.'

Karl von Batten, a committee member for the DC Republican party who is supporting the parents, said the case was personal to him because he also has an autistic son.

Mr von Batten said: 'To me, this is personal. My son is autistic, and if you tell him you are a penguin he will tell me he is a penguin.'

'I am very upset by what they have done in this case, there seems to be no safe-guarding. I don't want this to happen to my boy or any other child with autism.'

The family is seeking up to \$100million in damages and cover for their legal costs.



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Pictured above is hospital Chaplain Lavender Kelley, who is believed to be currently caring for the child. The individual says online that they do not have a gender

The lawsuit says the child is currently living with the hospital's 'non-gendered' chaplain, Lavender Kelley, who regularly posts online about trans issues.

In one post on Facebook from 2022, Kelley said they supported transitioning children without their parents' consent — saying they were 'drained' from arguing with families.

The suit adds that, since being removed from the care of his parents, the youngster has appeared in provocative and sexually suggestive poses on Instagram.

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It is unclear whether the 19-year-old has received any sex change treatments like feminizing hormones or gender reassignment surgery.

The lawsuit was filed in the Maryland District Court, accusing Children's National Hospital of eight counts including negligence, inflicting intentional emotional distress and discriminating against someone based on their religion.

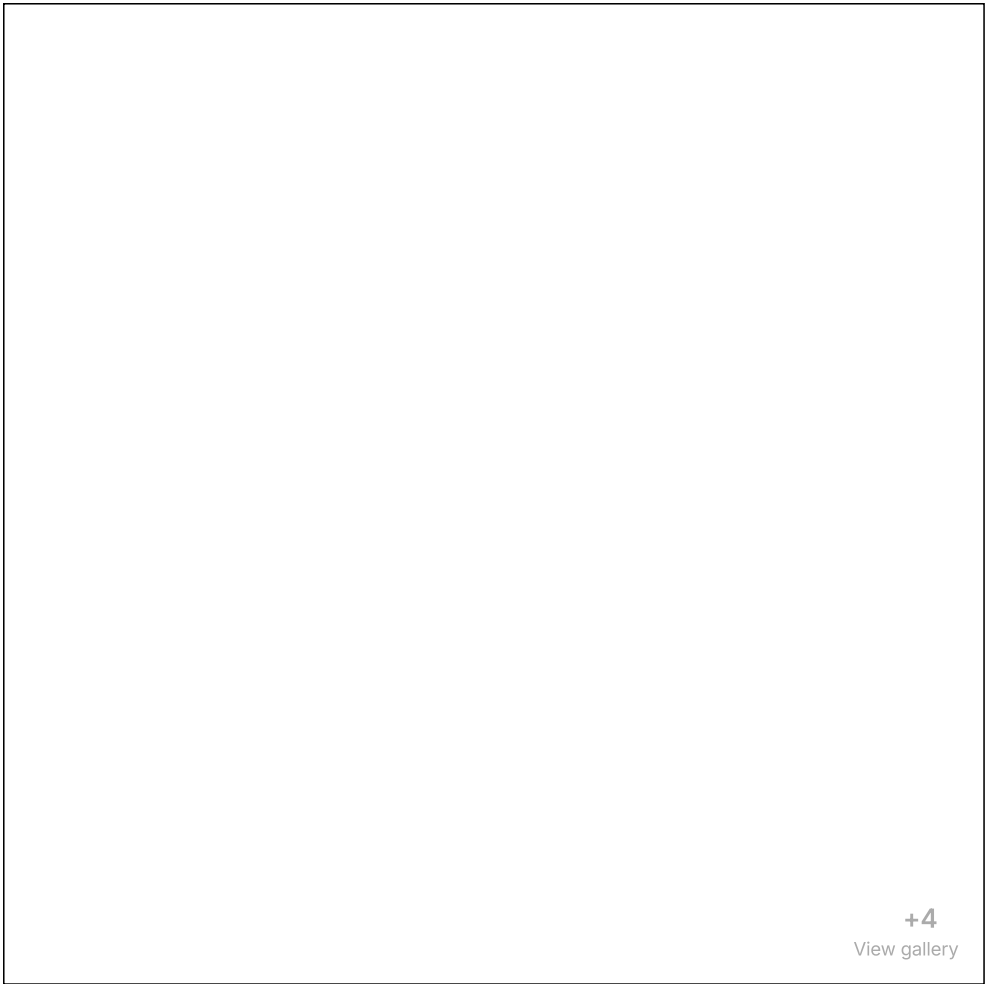
It has since been sealed by a judge, and is now in the Fourth Circuit US Court of Appeals.

In a statement, the hospital told DailyMail.com that the case had been withdrawn by the parents lawyers. Representatives for the parents lawyers denied this.

Children's National is ranked the fifth best pediatric hospital in the country, and treats around 223,000 patients every year — including those with gender dysphoria.

It also runs a 'Gender and Autism Program', which says it helps young children with autism to understand their gender.

Amos Jones, who is representing the family, previously said: 'This is the craziest case I've ever had. I don't know why there are people who think this makes sense. But I guess lots of people agree with this in Washington DC now.'



+4
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Ms Kelley, pictured above, has worked at the hospital in Washington DC for decadesThe

The family say their eldest son was hard working and initially home-schooled, before being sent to high school at age 14.

He graduated a year later, and was then accepted onto an Associates degree in Engineering program.

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He texted friends in May 2021 to say that he was LGBT, but used masculine pronouns — and at no point indicated that he wanted to be female.

Around this time, he was also undergoing tests for autism — and attending a counseling service for disabled children.

He was willingly rushed to Children's National Hospital in early November 2021, after he attempted to commit suicide following the end of his relationship with his girlfriend.

But — after the hospital determined he had gender dysphoria — he was held there for 41 days.

It was not clear how this was determined, or whether any tests or psychological assessments were carried out.

The child was then moved to foster services, the lawsuit said, and placed with a single foster mother who had a previous assault charge and was alleged to be a close friend of Ms Kelley's.

In July, 2022 — the boy made a second suicide attempt, and was re-admitted to Children's National as a girl.

He also had a second autism assessment in August, but at this meeting the foster mother removed him — claiming it was not necessary, according to the lawsuit.

The foster mother then died unexpectedly, with the boy believed to have been moved into the care of Ms Kelley, according to the lawsuit.

He turned 18 years old in March 2023, meaning he is now an adult and does not have to return to his parents if he does not wish to.

In the court filings, his parents accused the hospital of a 'cruel, abrupt, and intentional interruption of two fit parents' fundamental rights to parent their minor son'.

'[We] had never known of [our] son's purported desire or plan to change genders,' the documents read.

'Rather than treating [us] as patrons with legal and dignitary rights, the defendant... treated the parents as though they had harmed their son, even though the parents had never endangered their child and had home-schooled him to college entry at fourteen years old.'

They added: 'At Children's National, it is as if all critical reasoning toward the child was suspended, and there was no investigation into the extent that the child was lying.'

The parents have requested a trial by jury.

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