

## New Jersey Law Journal

# \$26M Settlement: Lawyers' Investigation Makes Difference

By Charles Toutant

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**T**he family of two teens who drowned in a public swimming pool have agreed to a \$26 million settlement of their Hudson County negligence suit.

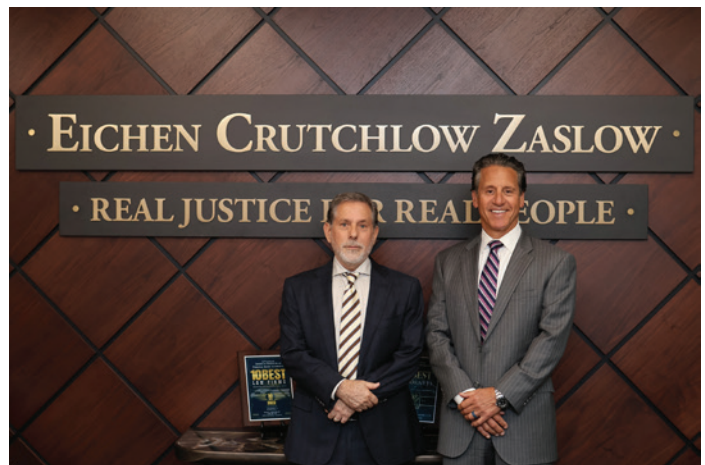
A police investigation into the deaths of Chu Ming Zheng, 19, and Jack Jiang, 16, at the Lincoln School pool in Bayonne on June 8, 2022 found no wrongdoing.

But a subsequent, in-depth investigation by New York and New Jersey lawyers for the teens' parents revealed widespread negligence and showed the deaths could have been prevented, according to Daryl Zaslow and Barry Eichen of Eichen Crutchlow Zaslow in Edison.

Zaslow and Eichen, along with cocounsel Qinglin Zheng Wong of QLW Law Group in Flushing, New York, obtained a \$26 million settlement on Nov. 13.

The brothers, who were learning to swim, were using the pool when they ventured into a diving well that drops abruptly from a depth of four feet to 13 feet, said Zaslow. The diving well was supposed to be closed but only a single traffic cone on the diving board indicated the area was off limits, he claimed. In addition, the pool was supposed to have three lifeguards watching swimmers at all times but only two were at their posts when the boys drowned, Zaslow claimed.

A lifeguard in the main section of the pool, Corey Kettleman, saw the boys were struggling, but did not blow his whistle, as is the standard procedure for emergencies, and did not jump in the pool to save the teens, Zaslow claimed.



Barry Eichen (L) and Daryl Zaslow (R) of Eichen Crutchlow Zaslow.

Courtesy photo

Instead, he allegedly walked to the kiddie pool area to summon another lifeguard, Alex Mariak, who dove into the pool and attempted to save the boys but could only remove one of them from the water. Meanwhile, Kettleman allegedly walked to a nearby office to tell the third lifeguard to call 911, Zaslow said.

The third lifeguard, Ashley Danback, testified that she was told to stay in the office, leaving the pool short one lifeguard, Zaslow said. And the pool manager, Paul Rickard, who was supposed to be on the premises, allegedly left shortly before the teens' drowning to visit a relative, pick up food and put gas in his car, Zaslow said.

Video footage of that moment shows Kettleman did not appear to be in a hurry when he went for help.

"What you see on that video looks as though you are walking leisurely through that lobby. Is that fair?" Zaslow asked Kettleman in a deposition. "Yes," Kettleman said.

"You never got wet," Zaslow said.

"I never got wet," Kettleman said.

Both teens had stopped breathing by the time they were removed from the pool, and they were declared dead a short time later.

The pool did not have any surveillance cameras but other areas of the building did, attorneys said. Footage from those cameras yielded information about staffing at the pool, as did body camera footage from police officers who responded to the emergency, Zaslow said.

"I have never seen a more chilling tragedy in my life. As you uncovered more and more discovery in facts of what happened, and at every level, there was just profound negligence in training the lifeguards, in conducting drills and having an emergency action plan. Every level just took your emotions from pure sadness to anger, because it was handled so negligently," Zaslow said.

The parties had two mediations with Raymond Reddin, a former Superior Court judge who is now with Hall Booth Smith in Saddle Brook. The settlement was reached with Superior Court Judge Joseph A. Turula.

The New Jersey Schools Insurance Group, North Jersey Educational Insurance Fund, is paying the settlement on behalf of the Bayonne School District.

At the outset of the case, Zaslow and Eichen were unclear how the teens died. But working with aquatics experts, they proceeded on the supposition that negligence caused their deaths.

"Somebody had to do something wrong for this to happen with both boys. That's how we went into the case. At every turn we would take a deposition and go from complete sadness that this could have happened to true anger that systematically, there were failures at every stage," Zaslow said.

A three-dimensional video presentation that plaintiff lawyers created was a "powerful" tool to show how safety precautions could have helped save the teens.

"We spent hours and hours and hours working with our experts and tweaking that digital presentation. It was extraordinarily expensive, but it was it showed the commitment we had as a firm to making sure these families got the justice that they deserve," Zaslow said.

Attorney Roshan Shah of Shah Law Group in Shrewsbury, represented the school district, Kettleman, Kohler and Mariak.

And Dawn Attwood of Attwood Corlette in Paramus, represented Danback and Rickard.

Defense counsel did not respond to requests for comment about the case.

- **Case Name/Number:** The Estate of Jack Jiang v. Corey Kettleman, HUD-L-761-23; The Estate of Chu Ming Zheng v. Corey Kettleman, HUD-L-763-23.
- **Filing Date:** March 2, 2023
- **Judge:** Joseph A. Turula
- **Court and County:** Superior Court of New Jersey, Hudson County
- **Date of Verdict/Settlement:** November 13, 2025
- **Description:** drownings
- **Plaintiff Attorney:** Daryl Zaslow, Barry Eichen, Eichen Crutchlow Zaslow; Qinglin Zheng Wong of QLW Law Group.
- **Defendant Attorneys:** Roshan Shah and John Regina, Shah Law Group, for Bayonne Board of Education, Corey Kettleman, Lisa Kohler and Alex Mariak; Dawn Attwood and Erik Corlett of Attwood Corlett, for Ashley Danback and John Rickard; John Nulty of Cammarata, Nulty & Garrigan, for Kettleman; Christopher Patella, Patella Law Firm for Danback.
- **Total Award:** \$26 million
- **Liability Apportionment:** 100% to Bayonne Board of Education.