

Olivia Griffin's lawyer argues New Boston Police were complicit in 'slavery' case

[By Jonathan Phelps Union Leader Staff](#)

May 5, 2026 Updated 12 hrs ago



Olivia Griffin wipes away tears while giving testimony at a hearing at Merrimack County Superior Court in Concord in July 2025.

DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER FILE

A lawyer for a woman who was subjected to years of abuse, forced labor and confinement in a basement in New Boston by her adoptive parents says the New Boston Police Department not only knew about the abuse, but was complicit in it.

In 2015, Olivia Atkocaitis jumped out of a second-floor window to escape the “extreme abuse” of her adoptive parents, Thomas and Denise Atkocaitis, only to be returned and reprimanded by police in front of her abusers, attorney Michael Lewis told three justices of the New Hampshire Supreme Court Tuesday morning during oral arguments.

Lewis has asked the Supreme Court to reverse a decision by Superior Court Judge John Kissinger to dismiss civil claims against the town of New Boston, New Boston Police Department and seven of its officers.

Police had been to the home in 2007, 2009 and 2011, with a sibling in 2011 saying the then-8-year-old child adopted from China was a victim of extreme abuse. The sibling reported Olivia “had been locked in a dungeon basement room for weeks at a time,” along with being whipped, pushed down the stairs and starved.

“The idea that there wasn’t actual knowledge when the police returned the child to the home requires the court to infer that the police didn’t do what they typically do, which is to look at records available to them to determine what has happened in the home to cause the child to have done this,” Lewis said.

He called the conduct of police “very extreme and inexplicable,” which includes allegations officers didn’t interview Olivia or her siblings, who would have corroborated the abuse.

Olivia Atkocaitis changed her last name to Griffin in 2024.

Last summer, Griffin, who is now 23, was [awarded \\$29.6 million in damages in the lawsuit against her adoptive parents.](#)

After the 2015 encounter with police, Griffin was able to escape the basement dungeon in 2018 by chipping away at the drywall with a bottle cap.

Brian Cullen, an attorney representing New Boston and seven individual officers, said there needs to be an affirmative act to find a state-created danger. The person would have to be left in a worse situation, he said, citing case law.

Senior Associate Justice Patrick Donovan pushed back on the idea, saying it overlooks reality.

“The New Boston Police Department returned this child into a home where there was a well-established record there was danger to her,” he said.

He said the situation of a 12-year-old running away from the home for two hours wouldn’t trigger a duty of care, where all records would have been looked at. The department sent reports to the Department of Division for Children, Youth and Families, he said.

Cullen said justices would have to find the actions of the officers not only negligent, but wanton and reckless.

“It has to shock the conscience,” he said. “It can’t be something we sit here and say I would have done better, he should have done it better.”

Lewis cited state law that puts the responsibility on the police to respond to and protect people from abuse. Officers should have seen documentation of extreme child abuse and neglect, he said.

Lewis argued the lawsuit as slavery under the 13th Amendment.

“Olivia suffered as a slave purchased from China and forced into captivity in the United States, including with the assistance, aid and approval of the New Boston Police Department and its named and unnamed, individual officers,” Lewis wrote in his briefing to the Supreme Court.

The justices will issue their finding in a written opinion.

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https://www.unionleader.com/news/courts/olivia-griffins-lawyer-argues-new-boston-police-were-complicit-in-slavery-case/article_55b0537d-6db0-4a57-9be2-3ea3024f6265.html