

AP

Lawyers: Nearly \$1B tentative settlement in condo collapse

*By Curt Anderson
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ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — A nearly \$1 billion tentative settlement has been reached in a class-action lawsuit brought by families of victims and survivors of last June’s [condominium collapse in Surfside, Florida](#), an attorney said Wednesday.

Harley S. Tropin announced the \$997 million settlement during a hearing before Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judge Michael Hanzman. Still pending final approval, the settlement involves developers of an adjacent building, insurance companies and other defendants.

“I think it’s fantastic,” Hanzman said, reacting to the update from attorneys. “This is a recovery that is far in excess of what I had anticipated.”

Earlier this year, Hanzman had approved [an \\$83 million settlement](#) to compensate people who suffered economic losses such as condominium units and personal property. A key question from the beginning has been how to allocate money from the property’s sale, insurance proceeds and damages from lawsuits among wrongful death cases and property claims.

The 12-story Champlain Towers South condominium partially collapsed in the early-morning hours of June 24, almost instantly destroying dozens of individual condo units and burying victims under tons of rubble. Rescuers spent weeks carefully digging through mountains of concrete, first to find survivors and later to [recover the remains of those who died](#). Ten days after the initial collapse, demolition crews used explosives [to bring down the remaining portion of the building](#) to give searchers access to additional areas where survivors might have been located. [A total of 98 people were killed.](#)

The tragedy in the town of Surfside, just north of Miami Beach, triggered lawsuits from victims, families and condo owners, and prompted [state and federal investigations](#). In October, [a coalition of engineers and architects](#) said the state of Florida should consider requiring high-rise buildings near the coast to undergo safety inspections every 20 years. And in December, a Florida grand jury [issued a lengthy list of recommendations](#) aimed at preventing another condominium collapse, including earlier and more frequent inspections and better waterproofing.

At the time of the collapse, Miami-Dade and Broward were the only two of the state's 67 counties that had condominium recertification programs.

The main lawsuit, filed on behalf of Champlain Towers South victims and family members, contends that work on the adjacent Eighty Seven Park tower damaged and destabilized the Champlain Towers building, which was in need of major structural repair. Champlain Towers was in the midst of its 40-year structural review when it partially crumbled to the ground.

Video released by a team of federal investigators showed evidence of extensive corrosion and overcrowded concrete reinforcement in the building.

Seven months after the collapse, temporary [structural supports were added](#) to areas in the underground garage of Champlain Towers South's sister tower, Champlain Towers North, in what the building's condo board called "an abundance of caution." The condo was built in 1981 and has a nearly identical design as the Champlain Towers South.

The little-known enclave of Surfside comprises a mix of older homes and condos similar to the collapsed tower, built decades ago for the middle-class, and recently erected luxury condos drawing the wealthy. That includes former first daughter Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, who live about a block north of the collapsed condo. The residents of Champlain Towers South were an international mix: South American immigrants, Orthodox Jews and foreign retirees.

This story has been corrected to show that Circuit Court Judge Michael Hanzman said he was shocked by the settlement, not Harley S. Tropin.