Airbnb to pay for funerals after shooting at listing

After Airbnb's CEO tweeted that the short-term rental platform was supporting families impacted by a massacre at one of its listings, lawyers representing one of those families accused the firm of doing nothing of the sort.

"They haven't even reached out to apologize," the attorneys said in a statement released Thursday, CBS's San Francisco affiliated reported. "They have merely responded in public with platitudes and thoughts and prayers or have made nebulous promises to 'do better' and 'improve trust.'"

The response from Airbnb was swift and underlines a shift among internet giants to take more responsibility for some of their allegedly negative side effects on society. The company announced after the critical statement that it would cover funeral expenses and counseling services for the families of the victims of the shooting, which took place at a Halloween party and left five dead.

The gesture came after Airbnb announced new safety measures designed to guard against out-of-control parties. The company now will include a rapid response team and manual vetting of suspicious listings flagged by risk-detection software.

But these remedial actions do not go far enough for the family in question. They plan to file a lawsuit, claiming that that Airbnb and the owners of the home where the incident took place were negligent in the wrongful death of their son, the San Francisco Chronicle reported Thursday.

The attorneys said in their critical statement that the incident was an "avoidable tragedy" that "would have been clearly foreseeable but for the dollar signs obstructing the view of Airbnb and the homeowners."

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They also accused homeowners, hosts, the town of Orinda, Calif., where the incident took place, and local police for enabling “essentially unregulated nightclubs.”

The person who booked the rental that hosted the party had allegedly lied about her intentions, reportedly saying that she wanted the unit so her family could escape wildfire smoke, USA Today reported. In response to the tragedy, Orinda is poised to ban short-term rentals that aren’t occupied by their owners.

Airbnb isn’t the only real estate tech firm that has had to deal with violent incidents at some of its listings.

The same night as the massacre in Orinda, a drive-by shooting took place at a separate Halloween party in a Phoenix home owned by iBuyer Opendoor. Five were injured.

At least 42 people have been shot at short-term rental properties across the U.S. in the last six months, many during parties at Airbnb rentals, the San Francisco Chronicle reported Thursday.

AirbnbWatch, an anti-Airbnb organization backed by the hotel industry, sent Inman an email citing negative events at Airbnb rentals as grounds for passing the Protecting Local Authority and Neighborhoods Act. The law would prevent Airbnb from evading “local laws enacted to protect neighborhoods,” said Mike Lux, the founder of American Family Voices, which is the organization that launched AirbnbWatch.

Tech companies traditionally have been reluctant to accept responsibility for what critics view to be the collateral damage of their products, such as interference in U.S. elections on Facebook. Farhad Manjoo, a tech columnist for The New York Times, has written that this hands-off approach has been key to their success at achieving “globe-spanning scale without bearing the social costs of their rise.”

But amid a recent “techlash,” the attitudes of some Silicon Valley giants are evolving. Whether measures such as those taken by Airbnb in response to the shooting will placate critics or silence calls for profit-threatening regulation remains to be seen.

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