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***Dr. Phil* Ratings Stunt Dishonors Tragic Case**

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Dr. Phil, a tabloid-style television program that seizes on the sensational to attract its audience, has -- according to media reports -- paid for the exhumation of Rebecca Zahau from her final resting place in a cemetery in St. Joseph, Missouri, in order to air the results of a so-called "independent" autopsy on the cause of her death.

Never mind that:

-- After nearly two months of intensive investigation by four law enforcement agencies, including the well-respected San Diego County Medical Examiner, it was conclusively determined that Rebecca's death was a suicide;

-- The pathologist *Dr. Phil* is using, Dr. Cyril Wecht, is

-- Both Members of the Zahau family and their attorney, Anne Bremner, have already publicly stated that they do not believe Rebecca's death was a suicide. They believe it was murder;

-- Dr. Wecht has already publicly-stated -- before examining the body or reviewing any substantive evidence -- that he doesn't believe Rebecca's death was suicide; and

-- This exhumation and "examination," without the involvement of any legitimate law enforcement agency, has fatally compromised any further investigation.

What makes this all the more bizarre is the tragic nature of this case. This past July, six-year-old Max Shacknai, the son of prominent Arizona business executive, Jonah Shacknai, fell from a staircase in his father's Coronado (CA) home, while in the care of Jonah's girlfriend, Rebecca Zahau. Max was rushed to the hospital clinging to life. Jonah and Dina Shacknai, Jonah's ex-wife and the boy's mother, kept vigil at his bedside.

After two days, Rebecca Zahau learned via a late-evening voicemail that Max was likely to die, which he did three days later. Several hours after she received the news, Ms. Zahau's unclothed body was found hanging from a balcony in an interior courtyard of that same Coronado home. Her hands and feet were bound with pieces of the same rope that was tied around her neck.

A two-month investigation found only Rebecca Zahau's DNA and fingerprints on the rope, the bedpost and the knife used to cut the rope. No other DNA or fingerprints were present. Only Rebecca Zahau's footprints were found in the dust on the balcony, evidencing that she maneuvered in a linear path alone to the balcony barrier so she could drop herself over and commit suicide.

There were no signs of struggle, nor any toxicology results to suggest this fit, strong young woman was in any way incapacitated. And the autopsy confirmed that death was caused by the hanging itself, ruling out any possibility that the hanging was staged to mask some other violent act. For someone to have killed Rebecca, as Ms. Bremner and the cable news talking heads have repeatedly asserted, they would have had to have been wearing a space suit and somehow levitated over the scene.

Further, the Sheriff has determined that cell phone evidence and video cameras at the hospital confirmed that Jonah was at the hospital standing vigil for his son the entire time that Rebecca Zahau's suicide could have occurred. Jonah Shacknai's brother Adam was polygraphed and also cleared.

The Zahau family's reluctance to accept that Rebecca's death was a suicide is understandable. The suddenness and circumstances surrounding it were traumatizing. What is not understandable is the approach they have taken.

I have serious reservations about the motive behind the decision to exhume Ms. Zahau's body for *Dr. Phil*. Doing so not only demeans the body and spirit of Rebecca Zahau, but also seriously compromises her family's stated goal of seeking justice through the opening of a new investigation.

The means that they may have been employed to do so, repeatedly going on tabloid-style cable news programs, stirring up scandalous media coverage, and now having *Dr. Phil* pay for the exhumation and second autopsy has ironically hindered rather than helped seek justice for Rebecca. This whole process, which is riddled with conflicts of interest, the elements of a type of "media circus," and without the guidance of law enforcement, will likely prevent the very thing that the family claimed it desired -- a new investigation.

The tragic and untimely deaths of Rebecca Zahau and Max Shacknai should not be trivialized or turned into entertainment. Airing the results of a second autopsy may be a way to get ratings, but it is a disservice and dishonor to Becky and Max. There is a better way to seek "justice."