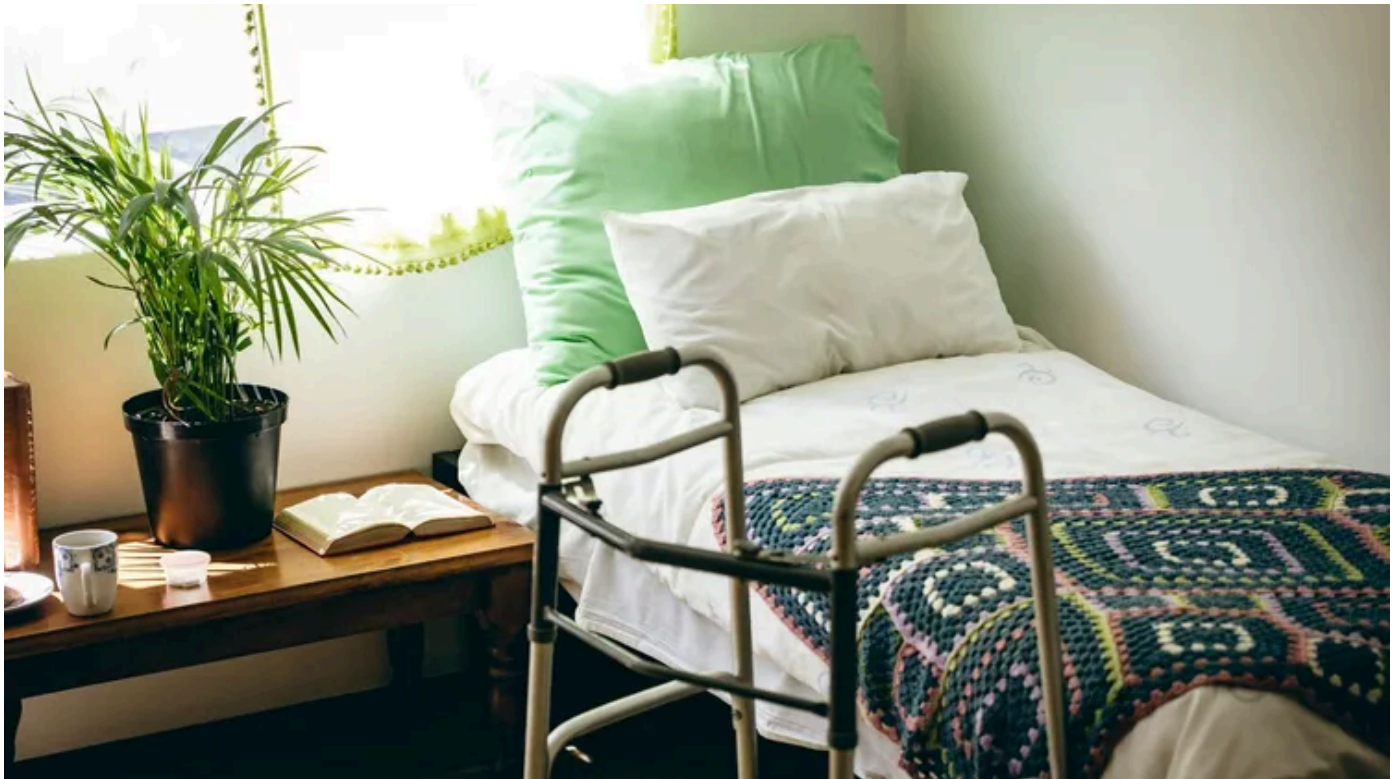


\$23.6M Verdict in PruittHealth Nursing Home Death Case

A Gwinnett County jury found PruittHealth liable for long-term care violations and awarded \$23.6 million to John D. Owens Jr.'s estate and family.

By [Zach Barreto](#)

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A Gwinnett County State Court jury in Georgia returned a \$23.6 million verdict against PruittHealth and related entities in litigation arising from the care of John D. Owens Jr., a longtime Fitzgerald teacher and coach who also coached in Wilcox and Dodge counties and scouted for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Owens died at age 76 on March 11,

unauthorized controlled substances, understaffing, and failures in oversight contributed to his decline and death. The verdict followed a two-week trial, with the jury returning its decision on Aug. 21, 2026.

Trial and Verdict in Gwinnett County State Court

The case proceeded to a jury trial in Gwinnett County State Court, a venue connected to the dispute because Pruitt Health's corporate headquarters is located in the same county. One account describes a two-week trial, while another states the matter went to trial on Aug. 10, 2026 and was expected to last two to three weeks, consistent with a June 2026 filing addressing scheduling. The jury returned its verdict on Aug. 21, 2026, concluding years of litigation work that included organizing extensive records, preparing witnesses, and presenting demonstrative evidence to address medication access, staffing conditions, and the facility's handling of testing and documentation.

Jurors found PruittHealth and related entities liable and found violations of Georgia's Bill of Rights for Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities. The award totaled \$23.6 million, consisting of \$12.6 million to Owens' estate for pain and suffering and \$11 million to his surviving family for the full value of his life. The judgment was entered against PruittHealth-Fitzgerald, LLC, PruittHealth, Inc., and United Health Services of Georgia, Inc., and it also included court costs and interest. The verdict also reflected findings that extended responsibility beyond the facility itself through agency and piercing-the-corporate-veil determinations, resulting in liability allocations to PruittHealth, Inc. and United Health Services of Georgia, Inc.

Claims of Unprescribed Controlled Substances and Chemical Restraint

Central allegations focused on drug testing that, according to the plaintiffs, twice showed Owens tested positive for morphine, lorazepam, and hydrocodone even though those medications had not been prescribed to him. The case narrative described Owens as having coherence and behavior problems while living in the nursing home, including incidents of crawling on the floor and getting out of bed unsafely. Plaintiffs contended the medications were used as chemical restraints to control behavior, rather than for a legitimate prescribed purpose. Evidence presented during trial was described as showing that only nurses at the facility had access to

The lawsuit referenced one documented drug-test result of 3,732 ng/ml of morphine, which plaintiffs asserted was well above a therapeutic amount. Under the Patient Bill of Rights for Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities, the plaintiffs argued that drugs cannot be used to chemically restrain a resident unless there is an immediate risk of harm to the patient or others. Based on these allegations, the family brought claims including [professional negligence](#), ordinary negligence, [medical battery](#), attorneys' fees, and punitive damages. The family's account further stated that in January 2021 they were notified of a significant change in condition and later learned from a physician and a nurse that testing had revealed concerning medications, after which Owens was taken to the hospital on Jan. 27, 2021.

Understaffing, Evidence Preservation Disputes, and Corporate Liability Findings

Beyond medication administration, the plaintiffs alleged chronic understaffing at PruittHealth-Fitzgerald during Owens' residency. They asserted that on the night the medications were allegedly administered, two nurses were responsible for 46 residents during the overnight shift, and that staffing pressures contributed to the decision to medicate Owens while managing competing care demands. The suit also raised claims that the facility failed to properly maintain and administer drugs, framing medication controls and staffing as interrelated safety failures. In addition, the case involved disputes over surveillance video and whether footage from the relevant period was preserved, with one account describing the loss of video that should have been retained as evidence.

The record also included allegations that the facility's administrator attempted to conceal what occurred, and that the facility's former medical director, Dr. Eugene Jackson, raised concerns about the medications and was later terminated. Plaintiffs further alleged that a nurse who challenged the use of chemical restraint was threatened with termination. PruittHealth disputed those allegations. The jury's verdict nevertheless incorporated broader corporate accountability findings, including determinations applying agency and piercing-the-corporate-veil concepts. In practical terms, those findings allowed liability to attach not only to the nursing home entity but also to PruittHealth, Inc. and United Health Services of Georgia, Inc.,

Post-Trial Positions and Practical Takeaways for Long-Term Care Litigation

PruittHealth maintained throughout the case that the unauthorized administration of the medications either did not occur or, if it did, caused no harm or did not contribute to Owens' death. It also denied that the facility was understaffed and argued that Owens received an appropriate level of care. PruittHealth further asserted that Owens died from pneumonia and related medical issues. After the verdict, the company stated it strongly disagrees with the jury's decision, identified what it characterized as significant legal and evidentiary issues, and indicated it intends to pursue available post-trial and appellate options.

For plaintiffs' counsel, BBGA attorney Evan Jones and Lance Lourie of [Cunningham Bounds Trial Attorneys](#) served as lead trial counsel. In the wake of the verdict and the court's entry of judgment, the litigation posture may continue to develop through post-trial motion practice and appellate review. The dispute also underscores how nursing home cases can turn on documentation of medication access and administration, staffing records, and whether potentially relevant facility surveillance is preserved. The Owens family's counsel, [Blasingame, Burch, Garrard & Ashley, P.C.](#), was identified as part of the trial team that prepared witnesses and evidence presented to the jury.

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