Companion of dead cameraman sues family

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A battle over the estate of an WTVJ-NBC 6 cameraman

killed earlier

this month

landed in a



Broward County courtroom Tuesday when his partner asked a judge to order dead the man's family to allow him back into the

house he says the two shared. Frank Gagliano, 36, says he

and Rob Pierce had been in a committed relationship for the past four years and that they lived together in Pierce's Deerfield Beach home for two years.

Pierce, an award-winning television photographer, was killed March 3 when the station's helicopter crashed in a Kendall neighborhood.

According to Gagliano's suit, "the Pierce family chooses to deny the fact that Rob was in a committed relationship with Frank and was gay."

Pierce, 34, died without a will. Under Florida law, because he did not have a spouse or children, his estate passes to his father.

The suit charges that Pierce's family changed the locks on the home and refused to give Gagliano, a condo manager, access to his belongings.

Broward Circuit Judge Thomas Lynch signed an order granting Gagliano the right to stay in the house unless the

family has him legally evicted. The family also is prohibited from removing any additional items from the house and must return any of Gagliano's property that has been taken.

The family's attorney said there is no evidence that Gagliano has any right to the house or its contents.

"It's not relevant if they were a couple, and the family has no position on that," said Joy Carr, the family's attorney. "Frank does not have a lease. He is not on the deed or on the utility bills. The name on everything is Robert Pierce.

Gagliano said his relationship with Pierce was relevant despite the lack of a will.

"There needs to be some legislation," he said. "If we were married and he died with out a will this would not b happening. I loved this ma more than anything else. would go to the end of th world for him as he did for me He went to work one day, and didn't get him back. And now don't even know where hi

ashes are." Though Broward County' human rights ordinance allow same-sex domestic partners liv ing together to register with th county, Pierce and Gaglian had not done so.

Gagliano's attorney, Eliza beth Schwartz, says her client' experience is a common amon gay couples.

"Everyone should be clear of their intentions; everyon should have a will," Schwart said. "Families should not b



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SEEKS BELONGINGS: Frank Gagliano and attorney Elizabeth Schwartz meet the press Tuesday outside courthouse.

able to come in and deprive partners of their right to live in their home and bury their loved ones."

Carr agreed on one point.

"You need to have a will," she said.

Herald Staff writer Caroline
J. Keough contributed to this
report.