

# Man gets 10 days for pregnant woman's death

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(Photo: Daniel Mears / Detroit News)

**Southfield** — Sentencing of a Beverly Hills man who caused a fiery crash that killed a pregnant Ferndale woman driving a recalled Jeep Liberty in November is likely just the beginning of closure and litigation for her family.

The parents, brother and father of the unborn baby of victim Kayla White, sat in the 46th District Court in Southfield on Wednesday as Clarence Quentin Heath Jr. was sentenced to 10 days in jail, two years of probation, a year of license restrictions and fines and restitution totaling about \$4,000.

Heath's Cadillac struck White's 2003 Jeep Liberty traveling more than 70 miles per hour on the Lodge Freeway near Telegraph as traffic slowed during rush hour, causing it to hit a vehicle in front of her, overturn and catch fire. She died as flames engulfed her car, according to the Oakland County Medical Examiner's Office.

White's family, its attorney said, plans to sue Fiat Chrysler for what it believes was the vehicle's role in her death. The Jeep was among 1.56 million recalled due to risk of fire when struck from behind.

Susan White, Kayla's mother, asked Judge William J. Richards to issue the Heath, 70, license restrictions and three years of probation for being the catalyst of the crash that killed her 23-year-old daughter.

"Dear Mr. Heath, on Nov. 11, your distracted driving caused a chain of events that resulted in the death of our daughter and her unborn son, Braedin," a tearful White said reading from notes. She asked the judge for three years of probation, a year more than what sentencing guidelines allow.

Heath pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor, causing a death while driving. His sentence was harsher than a Probation Department's recommendation. Richards said he changed his intended sentence as a result of the family's "heartfelt comments and appropriate concerns."

"It is inappropriate to call this an accident," Richards said. "It was a reckless act of driving with tragic consequences for an entire family. The sentence must reflect the seriousness of the crime and consequences of it."

As part of probation, Heath must wear a GPS tether for six months, perform 10 days of community service, undergo a mental health evaluation and receive random drug and alcohol testing. He received one day already served for his 10-day incarceration.



(Photo: Adam Hollier)

Heath has three drunk driving convictions on his record, none recent. Officials found neither drugs nor alcohol were factors in the crash.

Officials say Heath has continually showed remorse for the crash.

"I'd like to say that my heart goes out to the family," Heath said on Wednesday. "I can't imagine the feelings that they have by losing their daughter and their unborn child. I think about it every day, and I'm going to have to live with this for the rest of my life."

Heath's attorney, Douglas D. Hampton, argued the accident could have been a civil infraction "if there was no fire."

"Even if Ms. White's car had not erupted in flames" it would have been a "tremendously serious accident with tremendously serious injuries," Richards said.

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Hampton, after sentencing, said he could not make an argument for the gas tank causing the death "because that's a question of fact for a jury." Michigan law, he said, also says there can be more than one cause of a death.

"That's not my fight to fight now; that's obviously the family and the plaintiff's attorney's fight to fight, Hampton said. "My question was whether or not (Heath) was the cause of the actual death."

The Whites' attorney, Gerald Thurswell, stressed the cause of death following the sentencing: "Her death was caused because of smoke inhalation and the fire," he said. "But for the fire and the smoke inhalation, she would be alive today and so would the baby."

The SUV driven by White is part of a recall campaign from 2013 of 1.56 million 2002-07 Jeep Libertys and 1993-98 Jeep Grand Cherokees. Gas tanks on the older Jeeps are located below the rear bumper and behind the rear axle, and can rupture, leak gasoline and catch fire if the SUVs are rear-ended.

Thurswell repeated his pledge to file a lawsuit against Fiat Chrysler in the months ahead.

Heath "caused the accident, but he did not cause her death," he said outside court. "The fire caused her death."



*(Photo: Facebook)*

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