

## Motion to Disqualify Judge in Jean-Baptiste Case Rejected Over Timing, Lack of Involvement in Civil Suit

A week after a jury found Daryl Jean-Baptiste guilty of manslaughter, defense counsel moved to disqualify the judge over prior firm ties to the victim's family. She denied any conflict, criticizing the motion's late filing after the trial's conclusion.

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Daryl Jean-Baptiste, seen in the Superior Court parking lot, faces up to five years in prison after a jury convicted him of involuntary manslaughter on Wednesday for a 2019 fatal car crash, following roughly two hours and 45 minutes of deliberation. By. WTJX.

*Last updated on Friday, August 8th at 6:25 p.m.*

A week after a Superior Court jury [convicted Daryl Jean-Baptiste of involuntary manslaughter](#) in connection with the 2019 car crash that killed 24-year-old Davindra Ramsundar Jr., defense attorney Kye Walker filed a motion seeking to have trial judge Yvette Ross-Edwards removed from the case.

The motion argued that before joining the bench, Judge Ross-Edwards's law firm represented the Ramsundar family in a pending wrongful death lawsuit against Mr. Jean-Baptiste over the same incident. Filed in November 2020, the civil complaint—brought on behalf of the victim's father, mother, siblings, and estate—alleges that Mr. Jean-Baptiste was speeding at 60 miles per hour in a 35 mph zone, driving in the wrong lane, and had consumed alcohol before colliding with Mr. Ramsundar's vehicle. The suit accuses him of negligence, gross negligence, wrongful death, negligent infliction of emotional distress, and property damage, and seeks compensatory, punitive, economic, and non-economic damages.

According to the motion, Ross-Edwards's then-associate initiated the civil case while working at her firm, and no formal substitution of counsel was ever filed to remove the firm from the record. The filing further claims that the overlap between the criminal and civil matters, along with the judge's past or ongoing connection to the family's representation, could lead a reasonable person to question her impartiality. It also contends that a guilty verdict in the criminal matter could influence the outcome of the civil case, and raises concerns that the judge's familiarity with the facts might subconsciously impact her rulings.

Defense counsel cited Virgin Islands law and judicial ethics rules that require disqualification when a judge has served as a lawyer in a related matter, or when impartiality might reasonably be questioned. The motion also drew on examples from other jurisdictions, including U.S. Supreme Court precedent, to argue that the risk of bias extends beyond actual conflict to the appearance of impropriety.

In her written order issued Thursday, Judge Ross-Edwards rejected the motion, stating she had no knowledge of the civil case's circumstances and was not involved in it. She was particularly critical of the timing, noting that the motion came only after the trial concluded rather than at its outset. While acknowledging the motion technically met procedural filing requirements, she said the late submission "unquestionably frustrated the clean purpose" of the law, which is to allow a judge to evaluate their own competency at the start of proceedings. "Procedural manipulation to disqualify a judge is generally disfavored," she wrote, adding that such requests should be made before trial "consistent with legislative effect."

Judge Ross-Edwards noted that Mr. Jean-Baptiste still has "the alternative remedy of raising the issue on appeal."

Ms. Walker declined the Consortium's request for comment.