

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Drunk Driver Who Killed Woman And Unborn Child Gets Maximum 5-Year Sentence

Crime / **Published On December 14, 2018 11:52 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- The court room of Judge Harold Willocks was filled with emotion on Friday as the time had come to sentence Stephanie Ziegler, [who on April 5 was driving under the influence of alcohol](#), crashed into a vehicle and killed 25-year-old Fatima Brown and her unborn child. The St. Croix community was riled by the drunk driver's mugshot, which showed Ms. Ziegler smiling.

Ms. Ziegler's attorney made a passionate case to the judge to offer her client leniency. She said Ms. Ziegler, who had confessed to drinking half a bottle of vodka every night for three years straight, had sobered up, and had enrolled in Alcoholics Anonymous to stay clean. The attorney said her client had also vowed to honor the legacy of the two

deceased persons by advocating against drinking and driving, using her experience to warn others.

"It would be easy to say she should be put in jail for five years, but it is also a teachable moment," the defense attorney said. "Simply putting Ms. Ziegler in jail for five years would be a missed opportunity to teach." Ms. Ziegler had told the court in a prior hearing that on the night of April 5, she and her significant other had gotten into an argument, which prompted her to consume alcohol. The defendant was already in tears as she stood next to her attorney who was pleading with the judge for leniency.

When her turn came to speak, Ms. Ziegler's utterance was barely comprehensible. "April 5 was a horrific and devastating day," Ms. Ziegler managed as she cried. "The results of my selfish action killed a young woman and unborn child. Her family will lose that for the rest of their lives. I feel so -- words cannot express my sorrow and remorse. But I will show through my actions and honor that I am so sorry."

Ms. Ziegler's statement was followed by that of the deceased sister's, Clio Brown. In tears as she took to the podium to address Judge Willocks, Ms. Brown asked the judge to give the defendant the maximum sentence of five years without any suspension of years. "She knew exactly what she was doing. She was sober enough -- my sister flew out of the car and she never went to see how they were doing," Ms. Brown said, her voice welling with emotion.

When the accident occurred in April, Ms. Ziegler, looking at the victims on the ground, is quoted as stating that they were alright, and, "I know what they want."

"Fatima is never coming back," Ms. Brown wailed as Judge Willocks tried to calm her. "She was 25 years old. I will never know my niece or nephew. She had her whole life before her."

The Department of Justice requested a maximum sentence for Ms. Ziegler, telling the judge that making an example of the defendant would help Virgin Islanders take heed to the dangers of drunk driving."

Judge Willocks said he had paid close attention to Ms. Ziegler through the hearings on the matter, and not once did he witness remorse from the defendant. He said he had looked at her mugshot, which appeared to show Ms. Ziegler taking the tragic incident as a joke. Judge Willocks also spoke of the night the accident occurred, when Ms. Ziegler said she knew what the victims wanted, instead of expressing remorse.

"Two people lying on the ground, where was the remorse?" Judge Willocks asked. "That's a contradiction."

Judge Willocks then referred to a letter written in Ms. Ziegler's defense, which spoke of how she had apparently so passionately taken care of a dog. "Then an accident that you caused, there was no compassion? You didn't show shock to learn that someone had died. I looked at you when you came to court to the hearings... Crying does not mean remorse, I have seen it a thousands times. I try to find the good and give people a chance, but I can't in this situation."

"Friday was the first time that Ms. Ziegler had shown emotion during the entire process, Judge Willocks said. "You have affected so many lives because of your stupidity." Judge Willocks alluded to research performed by the court to determine whether Virgin Islands Code adheres to established punishment for the unborn, but he said VI Code was not clear on the matter.

In closing, Judge Willocks said, "I spent 2 hours reading and re-reading" the case. "The balancing factor is that the bad far outweighs the good."

Ms. Ziegler was given the maximum sentence of five years imprisonment with no time suspended. She was credited 25 days served and was ordered to pay \$75 in court costs. Her attorney requested that Ms. Ziegler be given an opportunity to turn herself in on Monday, but the judge denied the request. She was arrested in the court room and led to prison.

After the sentencing, Ms. Brown told The Consortium that she was pleased with the outcome, as the judge gave Ms. Ziegler the maximum sentence based on the penalty for the crime of negligent homicide.