

# Driver in fatal crash cancels parole hearing

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CRANSTON -- For two families who lost loved ones in a horrific 1999 car crash, yesterday's hearing before the state Parole Board was supposed to be an opportunity to argue for a longer punishment.

Instead, a last-minute decision by the man who caused the crash turned it into what some family members said was an unnecessary ordeal.

Stephen M. Reise, sentenced to 14 years for the crash that killed 13-year-old Kaitlyn DeCubellis and her best friend's mother, Marsha Bowman, had asked for the hearing with the hope of getting an early release from state prison.

But a few hours after the two Narragansett families testified yesterday morning, they got surprising news. Reise, 47, had decided at the last moment to cancel his portion of the hearing, held separately from the meeting with the families.

Lisa S. Holley, the board's chairwoman, said Reise had retained a lawyer the day before and apparently learned yesterday morning that his lawyer could not attend. She said the same-day cancellation was not unusual but called it unfortunate "because of the gravity of the case."

"It's too much on the victims," she said.

For the families, the hearing forced a reliving of a crash that brought statewide attention to the dangers of drinking and driving. Sometimes weeping, family members described how the deaths had affected them.

Meg DeCubellis said she and her husband, John, left their daughter Katie's room undisturbed for more than six years.

Their son, Kyle, couldn't bear "for a long time" to say his older sister's name, she said.

Weeping, DeCubellis said Katie had wanted to attend Brown University and then study to be a doctor.

"Right at this time, she would be applying to medical school and the thought of coming here today instead of working on applications for medical school was so wrong," she told the board.

Rebecca Bowman, 22, who survived the crash and is now a senior at Roger Williams University, recalled graduating from high school without her mother to share in what should have been a joyful moment.

"She was a hairdresser by trade and she always said she couldn't wait to do my hair for the prom," she said. "I remember going to the hairdresser and trying not to cry for the entire time."

In separate appearances, both families urged the board not to grant parole, saying Reise had shown through his actions since the crash that he does not take responsibility for it.

John DeCubellis, a former state prosecutor and a municipal court judge in Narragansett, said Reise's actions include three court filings, all of which have been dismissed: one alleging the accident was caused by Reise's sleep apnea, another alleging that DeCubellis colluded with the prosecutor who handled the case, and another that attempted to stop John and Meg DeCubellis from traveling around the country to talk about the dangers of drinking and driving.

"Basically, he continuously blames others and makes excuses and he does nothing to show that he is remorseful," DeCubellis said.

The parole hearing would have been the first for Reise, who pleaded no contest in 2000 to five counts of driving while intoxicated, two resulting in death and three resulting in serious bodily injury. He received a sentence of 14 years to serve followed by 15 years suspended, with probation.

The crash occurred on the night of Oct. 29, 1999, a day that family members recalled yesterday.

The girls had planned to go to a dance but reverted to plan B -- Katie spending the night at the Bowmans' -- when the dance was canceled.

Marsha Bowman, 44 at the time, agreed to take the girls to the mall. She took her son Rob's Honda Accord because it had a CD player and the girls wanted to play their CDs, Robert Bowman, her husband, said after the hearing.

On the way, the Accord was struck from behind on Route 4 in East Greenwich by a Toyota Camry being driven by Reise. The collision sent the Accord across the median into the southbound lane, where it was hit broadside by a car heading south.

Stephen Ryan, a retired prosecutor who handled the case, testified yesterday that Reise had been drinking most of the day and was also taking codeine. He also said witnesses reported that Reise was seen surveying the crash, smoking a cigarette and laughing.

"I tell you, this cavalier attitude has continued for years and years," he said.

Also providing testimony was Marsha Bowman's mother, Addie Warren.

"I was alone that night," she said. "I got a call and they said there's been a terrible accident and Marsha didn't make it. I said 'That can't be, I just ' talked to her at 5 o'clock. She said she was going to the mall.'

Reise was eligible for a parole hearing in 2004 but did not seek one until recently, Holley said. Most inmates are eligible for parole after serving one-third of their sentence, if their behavior warrants it, said Christine Santos, the Parole Board's victim advocate.

Holley said the hearing scheduled for August will be Reise's last opportunity for parole.

"We made it perfectly clear that this is the last continuance we will do, because it is too hard on the victims," she said.

John DeCubellis and Robert Bowman said the cancellation was typical of Reise.

"He had eight years, three months and 22 days to do this, to plan accordingly, and at the very last minute ... they go over to him and he makes that request," DeCubellis said.

Both men said the families will testify again, if needed.

"I will go back no matter what," Bowman said.

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