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CONTACT: Taylor Long, Public Information Officer
tlong@fresnocountyca.gov
559-600-4334

Impaired Driver Sentenced Following Jury Trial for Taking Life of 23-Year-Old in Fatal Crash

Today, on January 3, 2024, Amber Nicole Sexton (36, of Hayfork), was sentenced to the maximum term of 10 years in state prison for gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated and causing the death of Joel "Joey" Carrillo, Jr. Sexton's sentence was handed down by Judge Francine Zepeda of the Fresno County Superior Court after a jury convicted Sexton of all counts and all aggravating factors on November 17, 2023.

On November 10, 2020, at about 8:40 p.m., Sexton was driving a U-Haul pickup truck southbound on Highway 41 near Harlan Avenue when she crossed into oncoming traffic and caused a four-vehicle crash. Sexton struck the vehicle driven by 23 year-old Joel "Joey" Carrillo, Jr. head-on as Carrillo was headed home from preparing to become an MRI technician. Carrillo was transported from the scene by helicopter and pronounced deceased at the hospital.

When Sexton was contacted at the scene by Officers of the California Highway Patrol, she demonstrated signs of being impaired. Sexton was subsequently examined by a Drug Recognition Expert from the CHP, and was found to be unsafe to operate a motor vehicle. Despite Sexton's denial of any drug use to Officers, her toxicology results revealed that she had heroin and approximately four times the potentially toxic amount of methamphetamine in her system several hours after the crash.

At trial, the Defendant admitted to having both injected heroin and smoked methamphetamine that morning, but claimed that her habitual use of both gave her a tolerance such that her ability to safely drive was not affected. She further claimed that the crash was caused by a vehicle malfunction. The jury's verdict demonstrated a rejection of Sexton's story. The jury returned findings that the Defendant knowingly lied during her sworn testimony on the stand, that Joel Carrillo Jr. was a particularly vulnerable victim, that Sexton committed the offenses with a high degree of callousness, and that Sexton represented a danger to society.

This case was prosecuted by Senior Deputy District Attorney Steven Ueltzen with the Alcohol and Drug Impaired Driver Vertical Prosecution Unit, with assistance from Senior District Attorney Investigators Erika El-Helou and Virginia Rodriguez. Funding for the Vertical Prosecution Unit is provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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