

Koulis appeals conviction in sex/drug case

By Mitchell Kline • THE TENNESSEAN • April 21, 2009

NASHVILLE — Christ Koulis, a former plastic surgeon who was convicted of criminally negligent homicide in the overdose death of his girlfriend, has asked the state's Criminal Court of Appeals to overturn his conviction.

Koulis, 41, was sentenced to two years in prison in 2008 after a jury found him responsible for the death of Lesa Buchanan, 35. Prosecutors said Koulis brought and injected Buchanan with the painkiller oxycodone during a sex-filled weekend at her Cool Springs apartment on July 4, 2005.

Attorney David Raybin said Koulis was “convicted on thin air.” Raybin told three appellant judges today that prosecutors didn't have evidence to prove Koulis provided or injected Buchanan with the drugs. Raybin also raised issues with a search of Buchanan's apartment, which Koulis was paying for.

Raybin said Koulis did not give police permission to search the apartment. Franklin detectives entered the apartment three times before obtaining a search warrant nine days after Buchanan died. They had the lock to the apartment changed and told Koulis to stay away.

District Attorney General Kim Helper, said police acted properly and obtained permission to search from a relative whose name appeared on the lease.

Helper said the “state's view of the evidence is vastly different.” She said needles with an oxycodone mixture were found in the apartment and the same type of needles were discovered in Koulis' overnight bag and at his apartment in Chicago.

Raybin said that doesn't mean Buchanan, an admitted drug addict, couldn't have gotten the needles from someone else.

Helper said injection marks in Buchanan's groin were in “near perfect alignment,” which would indicate someone else pushed a needle through her skin. Koulis admitted that he had injected Buchanan before, but denied doing so in the days leading up to her death.

“This defendant is responsible for the injections,” Helper said.

Raybin also said that Judge Jeff Bivins, who oversaw the trial of Koulis in 2008, didn't give the jury proper instructions as to the offenses they were to consider. Jurors found Koulis guilty of criminally negligent homicide, but not the lesser offense of assault. Raybin said the jury was given an “either/or” set of directions, which allowed a decision to be made when there may not have been consensus among jurors as to what Koulis actually was guilty of.

The Court of Appeals is expected to make a decision within the next six months.