

Lawyer in Nashville wrong-way crash tells police where client was drinking

Suspect in I-65 fatal crash waives hearing

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The attorney for a woman charged in the fatal wrong-way Interstate 65 crash has handed over information to police about where his client was drinking beforehand.

“Certainly, if an individual, a patron, is overserved a lot, then there’s an issue there,” attorney David Raybin said Thursday.

Raybin, who represents Rebecca Benson, said on Thursday that he has already provided investigators with information about the “various establishments” where Benson was drinking before police say she killed Steffanie Leonard of Franklin in the head-on crash.



David Raybin

Benson, 22, is charged with vehicular homicide and is free on \$100,000 bond. She did not appear at a scheduled court appearance Thursday in Davidson County General Sessions Court, where her attorney waived her right to a preliminary hearing.

Raybin acknowledged individuals bear responsibility for drinking too much, but bars share blame when they overserve patrons. He declined to say where Benson had been drinking.

Benson is accused of driving the wrong way east on Interstate 40 and merging onto southbound Interstate 65, where she struck another car head-on near the Wedgewood Avenue exit. Leonard, 29, was making the rounds to stores as part of her job at PepsiCo.

When police arrived at the scene, they say, Benson said she thought she was in a taxi because she was “too drunk to drive.”

Friends and family have described Leonard as a strong-willed, fearless and driven young woman who looked forward to marrying and starting her own family.

Thursday’s hearing never actually began, with Raybin instead approaching General Sessions Judge Bill Higgins in between cases and waiving the appearance on Benson’s behalf.

Liability examined

Police and officials with the Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Commission have been investigating where Benson was served the alcohol. If she was overserved, it could expose a bar to liability under Tennessee law, which says establishments can be held responsible if they serve someone who is visibly intoxicated who goes on to hurt or kill someone else.

Raybin, when asked if he was looking into whether the bars could have some liability in this case, responded, "I'm looking at all issues.

"We will take the investigation wherever it needs to go," he said.

The case will next be presented to the Davidson County grand jury, which will decide whether prosecutors can pursue a trial. That could take weeks to decide.

Raybin said that in the meantime, Benson wanted to "express her sincere, sincere regrets to Ms. Leonard and her family."

The attorney went on to describe the accident as "an absolutely tragic situation."

Police have requested that anyone with information about the case call 615-862-7738.