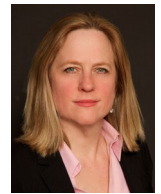




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**BRONX WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO MANSLAUGHTER FOR HIGH-SPEED CRASH
THAT KILLED UBER PASSENGER**

Racer was Driving Approximately 123 mph When She Rear-Ended Uber on Whitestone Expressway; Faces 18 Years in Prison at Sentencing

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Melissa Rodriguez-Lopez pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the first degree for killing a 62-year-old Uber passenger in May 2023. The defendant sped at 123 miles per hour on the Whitestone Expressway, caused a fatal roadway crash and then fled the scene with other racers. She later reported her vehicle stolen in a failed attempt to avoid responsibility for her actions.

District Attorney Katz said: “This defendant was driving at speeds of 123 miles per hour while racing, when she plowed her Lexus into the rear of an Uber and killed the passenger. After causing a fatal collision, Melissa Rodriguez-Lopez then walked into a New York City Police Department precinct and claimed that her vehicle was stolen. Sadly, the family of Steven Spaulding will have to live with the consequences of this defendant’s actions for the rest of their lives. We hope that this plea helps Mr. Spaulding’s family and friends as they continue to mourn his loss.”

Rodriguez-Lopez, 29, of Kossuth Avenue in the Bronx, pleaded guilty yesterday before Supreme Court Justice Michael Aloise to manslaughter in the first degree and assault in the first degree in satisfaction of the indictment. Justice Aloise indicated he will sentence the defendant on January 28 to 18 years in prison.

According to the charges, on May 27, 2023, at approximately 3 a.m., Rodriguez-Lopez was behind the wheel of a black, 2015 Lexus RC350 with personalized license plates driving northbound on the Whitestone Expressway traveling at a speed of approximately 123 mph in the vicinity of the Whitestone Bridge and Cross Island Parkway. Rodriguez-Lopez, who had a passenger in her car, was racing with other vehicles.

As she drove at a high rate of speed, Rodriguez-Lopez struck the rear of a Toyota Corolla in service as an Uber transporting 62-year-old Steven Spaulding of Brooklyn. The force of the collision caused extensive damage to both cars including the deployment of Rodriguez-Lopez’s airbags.

Spaulding sustained extensive spinal injuries and suffered a fatal stroke due to his injuries. The Uber driver also sustained significant injuries to his neck and body.

The defendant and her passenger exited Rodriguez-Lopez’s car and left the scene of the collision in the vehicle of another racer. The defendant did not identify herself to the driver of the Corolla or notify police at the time of the crash.

On the same day, later that morning, Rodriguez-Lopez went into the NYPD 52nd Precinct in the Bronx and filed a report claiming her Lexus was stolen. Video footage shows that at the time she filed the report, the defendant had visible arm injuries consistent with the deployment of the vehicle’s airbags. Rodriguez-Lopez claimed she was with a friend the entire day.

Vehicle data from the Lexus provided investigators with the speed at the time of the crash.

Assistant District Attorney Jonathan Selkove, Chief of the Vehicular Homicide Unit in the District Attorney’s Homicide Bureau, is prosecuting the case, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney John Kosinski, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Major Crimes Shawn Clark.

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Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.