

Alleged victim in O'Connell case 'haunted' to the end

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QUINCY — Rebecca Resendez constantly worried that nobody would believe her.

“She’d call me sometimes late at night and say, ‘do you really think anybody’s going to believe me? Do you really think he’s ever going to pay for what he did?’” said her attorney, Karen Orfaly.

The 17-year-old will never get the answers to those questions.

Resendez, the alleged victim in the statutory rape case against Quincy developer William O’Connell, was killed in a fiery car crash early Tuesday morning in Malden. Her death comes a short time after she returned to Massachusetts from California, where she was staying with relatives to get a break from the stress of the O’Connell case, Orfaly said.

“The damage that has been done to this little girl haunted her to her last day,” said Orfaly, who has represented Resendez in juvenile matters and encouraged her to come forward with her allegations against O’Connell.

Malden police have ruled out foul play as a cause of the accident, which occurred at about 3:30 a.m. in a residential neighborhood. The car Resendez was driving, which investigators said did not belong to her, was propelled into the air and into a sign pole after it struck a curb and granite stairs.

Speed appeared to be a factor, and there was no evidence of alcohol or drug use, Malden Police Lt. Detective Marc Gatecomb said. A medical examiner will conduct an autopsy on Resendez’s body.

Resendez’s passenger, a 19-year-old girl from Woburn, was injured and taken to Massachusetts General Hospital. Her name was not released.

O’Connell’s trial was scheduled to begin in October. The 73-year-old is charged with four counts of statutory rape in connection with an alleged relationship he had with Resendez in 2009, when she was 14. Resendez told investigators O’Connell gave her cash and a credit card to buy clothes and gifts, and a cellphone to keep in touch with her.

Phyllis Capuano, a 22-year-old from Everett, is charged as O’Connell’s co-conspirator in the alleged sexual assaults. Prosecutors say Capuano introduced Resendez to O’Connell.

O’Connell is also charged with cocaine trafficking. Investigators recovered 18.49 grams of cocaine during a search of O’Connell’s Marina Bay condominium.

It’s unclear what ramifications Resendez’s death will have on the case. Prosecutor Andrew Berman said he will decide in the coming weeks if he’ll “pursue any of the charges that remain legally sustainable.”

“For the moment, our thoughts are with her family, who have loved and supported her throughout this case,” Berman said. “She was an exceptionally intelligent and brave young woman, and her death is deeply saddening.”

O’Connell’s attorney, Stephen Delinsky, said Wednesday he had yet to think through the ramifications on the case, but said he and O’Connell are “very sad a tragedy has happened.”

“We extend our condolences to her family,” Delinsky said. “The classy and the dignified man that Mr. O’Connell is – notwithstanding the falsity of the allegations she made about him – he has no malice for her or her family.”

Resendez was born in California and moved to Massachusetts with her mother, who had found a job here and was seeking a new start, Orfaly said.

“This is no absentee mother,” Orfaly said. “This is an educated, caring, loving mother that never gave up on her.”

Orfaly said Resendez, a student at Woburn High School whose father recently died, was “vulnerable” upon her initial arrival in Massachusetts, and looking to make friends when she met Capuano.

“At 14 years old, those are the most formative years for an adolescent girl,” Orfaly said. “(O’Connell) skewed everything for her. Her mother couldn’t provide enough for her when he would give her access to all kinds of credit cards.”

Orfaly said Resendez’s mother “fought to get her off a track that (O’Connell) put her on,” and said it was “a struggle every day to get Rebecca to feel good about herself.”

Motions filed in court by O’Connell’s lawyer paint Resendez as a runaway trying to escape strife

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at home and a savvy girl who used abuse allegations in the past to avoid legal consequences for charges she was facing, including assault and battery and breaking and entering.

Orfaly said Resendez had reservations about coming forward about her alleged relationship with O'Connell and the effects it would have on her and her family.

"She took pride in the fact that she had the courage to go forward," Orfaly said. "But the strange thing about this child is she didn't want revenge. She never spoke in terms of revenge. She didn't want anything except to redeem herself. It's frustrating that the death of this beautiful child is going to benefit an animal like William O'Connell."

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