

Crash victim was accuser in Quincy rape case

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The teenage girl killed in a fiery crash in Malden yesterday was also the alleged victim in the statutory rape case against a wealthy Quincy developer, putting the prosecution of William O'Connell in limbo, officials said.

The 17-year-old victim, who the Herald is not identifying, was pronounced dead at the scene of the Medford Street crash early yesterday, where police say the car she was in hit a concrete embankment and burst into flames, also injuring another person in the car.

Andrew Berman, the special prosecutor in the statutory rape case against the 73-year-old O'Connell, called the victim an "exceptionally intelligent and brave young woman" who was "committed to seeing Mr. O'Connell face the charges and justice."

"Her death is deeply saddening," he said.

Berman said at the moment, "my thoughts are with the family," adding that it was unclear how her death would impact the case.

"We certainly wouldn't be able to use any of her prior testimony, but to the extent that other evidence may exist to support the charges, we intend to use that evidence," Berman said in a phone interview today. "It makes the case far more difficult to prove. There's no question about it."

O'Connell, who developed Marina Bay and Granite Links Golf Club in Quincy, was indicted in Norfolk Superior Court on four counts of statutory rape of a child, two counts of unnatural acts with a child and cocaine trafficking.

Berman said the victim's death isn't debilitating to the drug case against O'Connell.

"Really, my analysis is going to focus on primarily the statutory rape charges and I'll have to make a determination whether or not, given the fact she's no longer available to testify, whether those charges can survive from a legal perspective," he said, adding that the decision will come in "short order."

Malden Police Lt. Marc. Gatcomb said investigators were still awaiting the report from the state medical examiner's office before releasing the victim's name. He said police also haven't interviewed the 19-year-old survivor of the crash, who was taken to Massachusetts General Hospital with serious burns and injuries.

"She's heavily sedated," Gatcomb said. "We haven't been able to talk to her yet."

Police have said they believe speed and the weather were factors in the crash, which Gatcomb yesterday called "horrific."