



OFFICE OF THE SAINT LOUIS COUNTY ATTORNEY

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

A 23-year-old woman who sold heroin to a Hermantown woman who died after using it was sentenced to more than six years in prison Monday.

Kayla Jo Vranish, 23, no permanent address, pleaded guilty on June 17 to murder in the third degree for her role in the death of Kathy Davis, 62. At her plea hearing, the defendant admitted to selling heroin to Mrs. Davis on Nov. 29, 2014. She acknowledged that the victim died from using the substance sold to her.

The day after the drug sale, Mrs. Davis was found unresponsive at her Hermantown home by her husband, Andrew Davis. He reported that she was purple and didn't appear to be breathing. An uncapped hypodermic needle and a rubber tourniquet were found in her right hand. She was dead when paramedics arrived.

A small glass vial containing substances that were later determined to contain heroin and fentanyl was found in the victim's purse. Toxicology tests revealed that she had fatal levels of morphine and heroin in her system.

In State District Court on Monday, Judge Dale Harris rejected a defense motion that he depart from state sentencing guidelines and place Vranish on probation because she was particularly amenable to probation. The court imposed a guideline 74-month sentence for the defendant.

"This is a tragedy all the way around," St. Louis County Attorney Mark Rubin said. "Our sympathy goes out to the family of Kathy Ann Davis. Our gratitude goes to law enforcement for a stellar investigation into the heroin trade here in the Northland that has resulted in another person being brought to justice."

The case was prosecuted by Assistant St. Louis County Attorney Kristen Swanson based on evidence produced by Hermantown police, the Lake Superior Drug and Violent Crime Task Force, the St. Louis County Medical Examiner's Office and the toxicology department at the Hennepin County Medical Center.

This is the second drug homicide case prosecuted by the St. Louis County Attorney's Office leading to convictions this year. In January, an Iron Range man was convicted of third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter for providing a synthetic hallucinogen causing the death of his girlfriend.

"I am left with two questions: How many deaths will it take for people to either be afraid to ever even experiment with drugs, or to take immediate measures to seek treatment for their addiction?" Rubin

said. "And how many deaths and destroyed lives will it take for drug dealers to finally discover that obviously deeply hidden moral fiber to quit selling such a deadly, destructive substance?"

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