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QUEENS DRIVER SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR KILLING PEDESTRIAN
Defendant Was Intoxicated While Driving and Struck Several Vehicles in December 2019

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that Jorge Samaniego, 52, has been sentenced to up to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to aggravated vehicular homicide. The defendant caused the death of a pedestrian in December 2019 during a string of car crashes in Woodside, Queens.

District Attorney Katz said, “The sentence imposed yesterday by the Court punishes the defendant for taking a life after getting behind the wheel of a car while drunk. No one has the right to be this reckless.”

Samaniego, of Hull Avenue in Maspeth, pleaded guilty last August to aggravated vehicular homicide before Queens Supreme Court Justice Gene Lopez. Yesterday, Justice Lopez sentenced the defendant to 5 to 15 years in prison.

District Attorney Katz said that on December 11, 2019, around 8 p.m. the defendant was driving near Broadway and 55th Street, behind the wheel of a Honda Odyssey minivan. Samaniego rear-ended a red Infiniti as that driver was approaching a red light. The motorist inside the Infiniti exited his vehicle to survey the damage and asked the defendant if he was ok. Without saying anything, Samaniego fled the scene.

Continuing, the DA said, Samaniego drove erratically on Broadway toward 60th Street, where he ran a red light and struck a pedestrian, Mr. Alberto Zamacona, 47, of Woodside, Queens, who was in the crosswalk. The defendant continued driving away from the area.

According to Court records, at 61st Street the defendant veered into oncoming traffic in an effort to avoid hitting a car stopped at a red light. The minivan Samaniego was driving struck a taxi head on with so much force it caused a chain reaction of crashes. The taxi was pushed backwards and struck a Toyota Sienna, which in turn collided into a Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Mr. Zamacona was taken to a nearby hospital with irreversible brain damage. He later died from the injuries. The chain reaction crash caused damage to three vehicles and one of the drivers required medical aid for non-life-threatening injuries.

The DA said when police responded to the scene, they found the defendant exhibiting signs of intoxication - bloodshot eyes, slurred speech and he smelled of alcohol. The defendant was taken to a nearby police precinct where a test showed he had a blood alcohol level of .187. The legal limit is .08.

Assistant District Attorney Thomas Rooney, of the District Attorney's Violent Criminal Enterprises Bureau, prosecuted the case, with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Kaitlyn Gaskin, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Jonathan Sennett, VCE Bureau Chief and John Kosinski, Deputy Bureau Chief of the Vehicular Homicide Unit, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard Brave and Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel Saunders.

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