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**BRONX WOMAN SENTENCED TO 18 YEARS IN PRISON FOR DEATH OF UBER PASSENGER
IN HIGH-SPEED WHITESTONE EXPRESSWAY CRASH**

Defendant was Driving Approximately 123 mph When She Rear-Ended Uber

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Melissa Rodriguez-Lopez was sentenced today to 18 years in prison for killing a 62-year-old Uber passenger in May 2023. Rodriguez-Lopez sped at 123 miles per hour while racing with others on the Whitestone Expressway, caused a fatal roadway crash then fled the scene with another racer and reported her vehicle stolen in a failed attempt to avoid responsibility for her actions.

District Attorney Katz said: “Racing on our highways and similar pursuits are not merely thrill-seeking escapades, they are a deadly threat to public safety. In this case, a man tragically lost his life as he rode in a for-hire vehicle. We are grateful that we were able to provide justice for the victim and hope the sentence provides a measure of solace to his loved ones.”

Rodriguez-Lopez, 29, of Kossuth Avenue in the Bronx, pleaded guilty earlier this month to manslaughter in the first degree and assault in the first degree in satisfaction of the indictment. Queens Supreme Court Justice Michael Aloise sentenced the defendant today to 18 years in prison.

According to the charges, on May 27, 2023, at approximately 3 a.m., Rodriguez-Lopez drove her 2015 Lexus RC350 at approximately 123 mph while racing with other vehicles in the vicinity of the Whitestone Bridge and Cross Island Expressway. Rodriguez-Lopez, who had a passenger in her car at the time, slammed at high-speed into the rear of a Toyota Corolla transporting 62-year-old Uber passenger Steven Spaulding of Brooklyn. The force of the collision caused extensive damage to both cars including the deployment of Rodriguez-Lopez’s airbags.

The victim later died due to extensive spinal injuries leading to fatal stroke. The Uber driver also sustained significant injuries to his neck and body.

The defendant and her passenger got into the vehicle of another racer and left the scene of the collision without identifying themselves to the driver of the Corolla or notifying police.

Later that morning, Rodriguez-Lopez filed a stolen vehicle report at the NYPD’s 52nd Precinct in the Bronx. 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, prosecuted 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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