

REPORT NOTES SPEED

Newsday - Long Island, N.Y.
Author: KEITH HERBERT
Date: May 21, 2008

Stephen Catalano, the West Babylon man charged with criminally negligent homicide in connection with the death of a 14-year-old girl, was driving 55 mph in a 40-mph zone at the time of the crash, according to his defense attorney.

However, Catalano, 37, who made a court appearance in Suffolk County Criminal Court in Riverhead yesterday, wasn't going so fast that the crash should have triggered criminal charges, said Michael Brown, Catalano's attorney.

"That's not egregious," Brown said of his client's speed at the time of the crash.

Brown said he received from prosecutors a copy of a crash-investigation report that included the speed his client was allegedly driving.

The crash occurred on a stretch of County Road 101 in Medford that goes from 55 mph to 40 mph, Brown said.

The expert's report "really doesn't indicate anything criminal," said Brown, adding that he'd be getting his own crash investigator.

But Bob Clifford, a spokesman for the Suffolk County district attorney's office, said the same report stated investigators "conservatively" estimated Catalano's speed at 55 mph, and that he had gone through a red light.

Catalano's next court date is July 16. He is free on \$2,500 bail.

Angelica Nappi of Holbrook died three days after the crash from brain injuries. Rachel Williams, 19, of Bellport, was driving with Nappi and three other girls, ages 12, 13 and 14, who were also injured in the Feb. 19 crash.

Two passengers in Catalano's Jeep also were injured.

Police initially charged Catalano with being under the influence of unspecified drugs when the crash occurred. Charges of first-degree vehicular assault were later dropped because lab reports indicated he was not impaired.

Catalano's record includes seven convictions for aggravated unlicensed operation of a vehicle, according to state records.

Credit: BY KEITH HERBERT. keith.herbert@newsday.com