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## **DA Reinforces Anti-DUI Message Following Sentencing of Katelyn Fultz**

**SANTA BARBARA, Calif.**— On May 1, 2025, Carly Howard was driving to work on the San Marcos Pass when her vehicle was struck by a truck driven by Katelyn Fultz. Fultz was driving without a driver's license and with a blood alcohol concentration more than twice California's presumptively illegal limit when Fultz crossed the center line and collided with Carly's vehicle. Carly never regained consciousness. Her family was forced to endure the unimaginable heartbreak of saying goodbye to a loved one on Mother's Day weekend. Carly's life was taken by an entirely preventable act.

Sadly, cases like Carly's are not isolated tragedies. Every year, families throughout Santa Barbara County and across the state and nation experience devastating and irreversible loss because someone chose to drive impaired. Behind every impaired-driving fatality statistic is a victim whose future was stolen and a family forever changed.

According to the California Office of Traffic Safety, Santa Barbara County ranked 12th statewide for traffic crash victims killed or injured in 2022, 19th for alcohol-involved crashes, and 10th for alcohol-related crashes involving drivers under 21. Locally, felony DUI-with-injury cases prosecuted by the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office increased from 74 in 2020 to 121 in 2024. From 2020 through 2025, the Office also prosecuted 25 DUI manslaughter cases - each representing a life lost and loved ones left heartbroken by impaired drivers.

When Carly's loved ones came to court for sentencing, they hoped the criminal justice system would provide a meaningful sense of accountability and recognition for the magnitude of their loss. They spoke powerfully about Carly's life, her kindness, and the tremendous void left behind by her death. The District Attorney's Office and the Probation Department recommended a significant state prison sentence based on the seriousness of the offense and the danger posed to the community.

The decision to impose a sentence of probation instead of prison made by a visiting judge left Carly's family deeply disappointed and struggling with the feeling that the impact on the victim and her loved ones was overshadowed by the focus on the defendant. While reasonable people may differ on sentencing decisions, cases involving impaired driving fatalities raise important questions about accountability, deterrence, and public safety.

At a subsequent hearing regarding probation conditions, the District Attorney's Office requested that if the defendant was to be released on electronic monitoring, she also be ordered to wear a SCRAM device - an alcohol-monitoring bracelet designed to detect alcohol consumption and help ensure compliance with court-ordered sobriety conditions. Given that the defendant in this case had already killed one person while driving impaired, the request was made out of concern for public safety and the prevention of future harm. That request was denied by the same visiting judge who imposed the sentence of probation.

What should never be lost in these discussions is the human cost of impaired driving. Carly was not simply a case number or a statistic. She was a daughter, a sister, a loved one, and a member of this community whose life mattered deeply.

The impact of this case has also been felt throughout the District Attorney's Office, particularly by the Victim Advocates and Deputy District Attorneys who worked closely with Carly's family throughout the proceedings. Cases involving the loss of innocent life leave a lasting effect not only on surviving family members, but also on the professionals tasked with seeking justice on their behalf.

Felony DUI filings in Santa Barbara County have increased by 60% since 2019. This trend reflects a serious and ongoing public safety concern that demands continued attention, education, enforcement, and accountability. The Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office remains committed to vigorously prosecuting impaired-driving offenses and seeking appropriate consequences in cases where innocent people are injured or killed.

But prosecution alone is not enough. Preventing impaired driving requires a community-wide commitment. Our office continues to partner with local law enforcement agencies, schools, victim advocacy organizations, and community groups dedicated to preventing impaired driving and supporting victims and survivors, including Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

MADD has long worked to educate the public about the devastating and lifelong consequences of impaired driving. Its mission includes supporting victims and survivors, increasing public awareness, strengthening prevention efforts, and advocating for policies and laws aimed at reducing impaired-driving deaths and injuries. These partnerships are critical because preventing impaired driving cannot rest solely on a criminal justice system that becomes involved only after a tragedy has already occurred.

Every member of the community has a role to play in prevention. If someone is impaired, do not let them drive. Take the keys. Help arrange a ride. Call a friend, family member, taxi, or rideshare service. If necessary, contact law enforcement before someone gets hurt. These conversations and interventions can feel uncomfortable in the moment, but they may save a life.

Too often, people assume tragedy will happen somewhere else or to someone else. Carly Howard's case is a painful reminder that the decision to drive impaired can permanently alter countless lives in an instant. I recently had the opportunity to speak with Carly's parents. Their strength, grace, and faith in the face of unimaginable loss were profoundly moving. Nothing the criminal justice system can do will ever restore what they lost. But the system should always strive to provide victims and their families with dignity, a voice, and the sense that their pain has been heard and recognized.

The best way we can honor Carly's memory - and the memory of every victim lost to impaired driving - is to remain steadfast in our efforts to prevent these tragedies from happening to another family. That means continuing to prioritize public safety, supporting victims, holding offenders accountable, and working every day toward the goal of eliminating impaired driving in our community.

At its core, the criminal justice system must never lose sight of the people most harmed by crime. Victims and surviving family members deserve compassion, support, and a justice system that recognizes the profound and lasting impact these crimes leave behind.

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