

Michelle Hanson pleads guilty

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Michelle Hanson, a mother who faced charges in relation to the 2018 death of her three-year-old son Kaden Young, has pleaded guilty to criminal negligence causing death.

Hanson appeared in Orangeville court virtually on Tuesday (Nov. 23), alongside her lawyer, Hal Mattson to enter her plea.

Hanson was charged in relation to her son's death after her vehicle was pulled into the Grand River on the early morning hours of Feb. 21, 2018, during a period of heavy flooding which saw river water rise up onto the road. Both Hanson and Kaden escaped the vehicle, but Kaden was pulled out of his mother's arms. His body was later recovered in Belwood Lake on April 21, two months to the day of the incident.

In an agreed statement of facts, read by Crown attorney Danielle Garbaty, the court heard that Hanson had taken Kaden, who was having trouble sleeping, for a drive into Grand Valley where she planned to attend a convenience store. Within minutes of leaving her home, Hanson drove her vehicle around a road closer barrier on the 10th Line of Amaranth onto a flooded section of the road. Her vehicle was swept into the Grand River.

"She was able to escape the vehicle with Kaden, but lost grip of him as they were swept down the river by the strong current," said Garbaty.

Hanson was pulled from the river by EMS, and was described as showing "slow and odd movements and appeared confused", which are all consistent with symptoms of hypothermia, said Garbaty.

Paramedics attending to her detected an odor of alcohol. Blood samples obtained at the hospital, which were analyzed by the Centre for Forensic Sciences showed Hanson had a blood alcohol concentration of 60 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood.

Oxycodone was also detected, but was noted to be a concentration that has been associated with a "therapeutic range".

Garbaty said a toxicologist was unable to provide an opinion to whether driving would have been impaired at the time.

Mattson, Hanson's lawyer, prior to the reading of the agreed statement of facts requested a minor addendum to change the word "would" in reference to having seen the road barricade to "should".

Following the reading of agreed statement of facts, Justice Gisele Miller accepted the guilty plea.

Hanson was charged in October of 2018, and was ordered to stand trial on counts of impaired driving causing death and criminal negligence causing death following a preliminary inquiry in 2019. Her trial, which was scheduled to begin in a Guelph courtroom in March of 2021, was delayed due to a hold on jury trials during the pandemic, and the request from her former lawyer, Marco Forte, to be removed as her counsel.

Mattson said his client acknowledged impairment by alcohol caused impaired judgment that caused the incident.

In sentencing, Mattson asked the court to consider that Hanson has been seeing a counselor and provided regular urinalysis test to confirm she is not using illicit drugs.

?I think that would be a great assistance to the court so the court would know that she's on the right track,? said Mattson.

Hanson's sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 18, 2022.