



Stiffer Penalties are Needed for Careless & Negligent Drivers

On August 11, 2010 Paul Sermon stood before the Judge in Sumter County FL yet again. This time it was only a Status Hearing as he had already pleaded "Not Guilty" to his March 13th killing of four bikers. Luckily, he's currently off the roadways while he is held on a \$202,500 bond facing nine charges including four DUI Manslaughter and four Vehicular Homicide charges. Oh yeah, he was also driving on a suspended Driver's License at the time of the fatal crash.

Sermon will be back in court on October 13th, since the medical examiner's and other reports weren't back in time for today's hearing. ABATE of Florida, Inc. members from Sumter, Seminole, Lake, Freedom, Nature Coast, and Marion County chapters, as well as "Doc", ABATE of FL's State President, and many other bikers were there with the families at Sermon's arraignment; ABATE members were there on August 11th, and we'll be there in October.

This is not an isolated case by any means.

On March 6, 2010, Pamela Knight wasn't paying attention while she was driving in Pensacola, FL. She failed to yield the right of way to Pastor Gary Laird on his Harley Davidson Ultra Classic (not a small bike by any means). Knight's careless driving caused Pastor Laird to strike her vehicle; he was pronounced dead at the scene. ABATE of Florida members and other bikers were over 100 in numbers at her first court appearance on June 11, 2010. On July 16th 2010, the presiding Circuit Judge Joyce Williams held Knight's arraignment. Knight, having prior Careless Operation violations, pled "No Contest". This allowed for immediate sentencing, and the Judge allowed Debbie Laird to offer a Victim's Impact Statement, as well as ABATE of Florida's Gulf Coast Chapter President "Satch" to educate the Court on our Stiffer Penalties initiative and what we are about. After Satch's dissertation, Judge Williams stated on the record that she supports Stiffer Penalties in cases similar to this.

Knight was found guilty, received \$1,166 total in fines, 6 months suspended of her Driver's License, 50 hours of community service in a Trauma Center, and is required to attend the same motorcycle endorsement course that new riders must take, at her own expense. Many past violators in cases like this have only received \$87 tickets!

Although the Judge handed down a heavier sentence than the typical \$87 ticket in these all-too-often cases, after numerous violations and finally killing someone, Pamela Knight is still essentially a free person. We applaud Judge Williams' application of available penalties, but this case is another example of the need for stiffer penalties to be available to the Courts.

For the last few years ABATE of Florida has been attempting to get a Stiffer Penalties Bill through the Florida Legislature, one with jail time guaranteed to those killing motorcyclists. We almost succeeded in this past Legislative Session, but Senator Oelrich (who is up for re-election in the Alachua County area) essentially killed our Bill.

If you feel that motorcyclists' lives are worth the same as any other motorists', pay attention to who you vote for this election season. If you feel that motorcyclists' lives are worth more than an \$87 ticket, or even more than \$1,166 in fines, contact your elected officials and let them know. If you are outraged at the lack of value "the system" puts on motorcyclists' lives, join us in our fight. These are just some of the battles ABATE of Florida, Inc. fights.

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