

88-year-old Massachusetts driver who struck and killed 4-year-old girl sentenced to 6 years probation



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Associated Press Ilse Horn, 88, reacts during a hearing on Thursday at Norfolk Superior Court in Dedham, where she pleaded guilty to motor vehicular homicide. Horn, who struck and killed a 4-year-old girl on June 13 as she crossed a street in Stoughton, was sentenced to six years of probation and will lose her driver's license for 10 years. DEDHAM (AP) -- An 88-year-old driver who struck and killed a 4-year-old girl as she crossed a

suburban Boston street was sentenced to six years of probation Thursday after she pleaded guilty to negligent motor vehicle homicide.

Ilse Horn also will lose her driver's license for 10 years, which is mandatory for anyone convicted of a motor vehicle homicide charge in Massachusetts.

Horn was charged after she struck Diya Patel on June 13 as the girl crossed the street in a crosswalk with her grandfather and two siblings in Stoughton, about 15 miles south of Boston.

A not guilty plea was entered on Horn's behalf last month. Horn changed her plea Thursday in Norfolk Superior Court.

Horn, who lives in an assisted living facility in Canton, could have faced a maximum of 2 1/2 years in prison on the misdemeanor charge. The probation term imposed by Judge Paul Chernoff fell between the 15 years prosecutors had asked for and the one year her defense attorney had sought.

The accident was one of a series of recent crashes involving elderly drivers that has led to renewed calls for stronger driver testing requirements in Massachusetts.

Police said Horn -- who turns 89 Sunday -- did not brake before hitting Diya, who was riding and pushing a scooter while crossing the street with her family. They said the crosswalk was clearly marked and Horn should have seen it nearly 400 feet before she got to it.

The Boston Herald reported that her husband, Charles Horn, died in a 1992 crash that authorities said happened after Ilse Horn fell asleep while driving in Klamath, Calif. She wasn't charged in her husband's death, which was ruled an accident.

In a statement Assistant District Attorney Debi Payton read in court, Diya's parents said they did not want Horn to go to jail, given her age. But they asked that she surrender her license and not drive. They also urged state officials to find a way to better regulate elderly drivers "so that other families do not go through what we have gone through."

Horn's attorney, Michael Galvin, said she is a Holocaust survivor who fled Germany with her parents in 1939. Galvin said she decided to plead guilty because she wanted to accept responsibility for the accident and to put it behind her, "not only for her, but for the Patel family in hopes that it will expedite the healing process," Galvin said.

State officials revoked Horn's driver's license after the accident, finding her "an immediate threat."

Horn's driving record shows that she has been found responsible in five car accidents in Massachusetts since 1982.