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Parents want tougher school van rules after daughter's death

The Associated Press - Wednesday, November 14, 2007

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school van and a school bus want more oversight of van drivers who transport students.

Amanda Berglund, 14, and Scott D. Wendt, the 30-year-old driver of a school-hired van, both died when the van slammed into the back of a stopped school bus near Hugo on May 17. Wendt had marijuana in his system, and a marijuana pipe and recent speeding ticket were discovered in the Dodge Caravan.

Berglund's parents said they were sickened to learn about the marijuana use. Now they want lawmakers to toughen standards for drivers who carry students in smaller vehicles that don't require commercial school bus licenses. They have support from Wendt's employer, Twin City Transportation.

"You don't smoke pot when you are driving or when you are driving children around. He shouldn't have been doing that. There shouldn't have been any in his system," said Bill Berglund, Amanda's father. "My daughter had to die to change a law that should have been changed a long time ago."

Wendt didn't have to meet the more stringent standards and training required of school bus drivers because he drove a minivan. Mike Weidner, the attorney for Twin City Transportation, said the company followed state law by checking Wendt's driving record going back three years before hiring him, and Wendt maintained a clean record after he was hired.

Weidner said the marijuana use was a shock to the company and "absolutely against company policy."

Wendt got a speeding ticket two days before the crash for going 17 miles over the 30 mph speed limit in St. Paul, and state records showed he got five speeding tickets

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between 1997 and 2002.

Amanda's parents, Bill and Karen Berglund, learned after the crash that Amanda told friends Wendt was speeding and weaving in and out of traffic while driving her to or from the St. Paul school she attended.

"It was really hard for us to deal with this," Bill Berglund said.

Washington County Capt. Patrick Olson declined to give details on the amount of marijuana in Wendt's body because of state data privacy rules.

Since the crash, Twin City Transportation has started requiring its van drivers to meet tougher bus driver standards, disclose any speeding tickets and undergo twice-monthly checks on their driver's licenses, Weidner said.

Meanwhile, school bus driver Daryl G. Eastman pleaded guilty to a petty misdemeanor and paid \$182 in fines and fees for stopping that day at an unapproved spot, according to Washington County attorney spokeswoman Susan Harris. He and the students on the bus had no major injuries.

Information from: Star Tribune, <http://www.startribune.com>

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