

## THE BUFFALO NEWS

# Theft preceded fatal crash that killed driver's best friend, prosecutors say



Aleia Easley, 23, of Buffalo, was arraigned in the April 23 fatal crash in Cheektowaga that killed her passenger, Jacquelyn McClain, 21. (Aaron Besecker/Buffalo News)

By Aaron Besecker ([https://buffalonews.com/author/aaron\\_besecker/](https://buffalonews.com/author/aaron_besecker/)) and Harold McNeil ([https://buffalonews.com/author/harold\\_mcneil/](https://buffalonews.com/author/harold_mcneil/)) | Published June 14, 2019 | Updated June 14, 2019



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The woman charged with killing her best friend in an April crash in Cheektowaga had just stolen from a nearby grocery store and significantly damaged her car in another crash just prior to the fatal collision, prosecutors allege in court documents.

Aleia C. Easley was speeding away from the Save A Lot store on South Rossler Avenue when she ran a red light and struck another vehicle at the intersection of Rossler and Dingens Street, less than a quarter mile away, according to prosecutors.

That collision caused her passenger, Jacquelyn M. McClain, to be ejected from the vehicle. McClain, 21, died at the scene.

The fatal collision happened at 8:10 p.m. April 23, town police previously said. Easley's Honda was traveling "at a high rate of speed" when it struck a 2016 Chevrolet Equinox, police said.

Preceding the accident, Easley and McClain had been confronted by a store employee before running from the store, Erie County District Attorney John J. Flynn said during a news conference Friday in his office.

"One of the loss prevention officers at Save A Lot saw them shoplifting and he kind of chased the two girls out of the Save A Lot," Flynn said.

Flynn said it was Easley's conduct after the shoplifting incident that motivated him to charge her with second-degree manslaughter.

"It's the recklessness in her conduct by driving at a high rate of speed down Rossler Avenue and going through a red light at a high rate of speed, which resulted in the death of another human being," said Flynn.

The first collision had happened when Easley was backing out of a parking space, according to prosecutors, and caused the passenger side door of Easley's Honda Accord to be "jammed open" from the impact, according to a felony complaint filed in Cheektowaga Town Court.

McClain had been unable to close the car door after the first crash, according to the court documents.

"I believe she had to know that the passenger door was broken and the door was off to a certain degree, yet she continued to travel at a high rate of speed and go through a red light with, at a minimum, a broken passenger door knowing that her friend was next to that broken passenger door," Flynn said.

Easley, 23, had been driving north on Rossler, in a 30 mph zone, at speeds in excess of 60 mph, according to court papers and the narrative offered by Flynn at his news conference Friday.

She also was charged with petit larceny, reckless driving, imprudent speed, passing a red light, not wearing a seat belt, leaving the scene of a property damage accident, backing unsafely and driving without insurance.

Easley pleaded not guilty at her arraignment Friday morning in Cheektowaga Town Court. Easley was released on her own recognizance and is due back in court July 19, according to the District Attorney's Office. [\(https://buffalonews.com/\)](https://buffalonews.com/)

Flynn said a petit larceny charge on its own likely would have led to the charge being handled with an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal, meaning it would have been dropped if she stayed out of trouble.

"The fact of the matter is, at the end of the day, these two poor girls – one who is dead now – probably would have gotten a slap on the wrist," he said.

Easley and McClain went to high school together and were best friends, according to Easley's defense attorney, Jessica Kulpit.

Kulpit said neither drugs nor alcohol were factors in the crash.

Kulpit told Town Justice James J. Speyer Jr. that Easley's family got in touch with her following the crash and they were waiting to see what, if any, charges would be filed by the District Attorney's Office.

Easley spent a couple of weeks in the hospital, underwent pelvic surgery and has no mobility in her left leg. She also spent almost two weeks in a rehabilitation center and may not fully recover from her own injuries, her attorney said.

"She is the opposite of a flight risk," the attorney told the judge.



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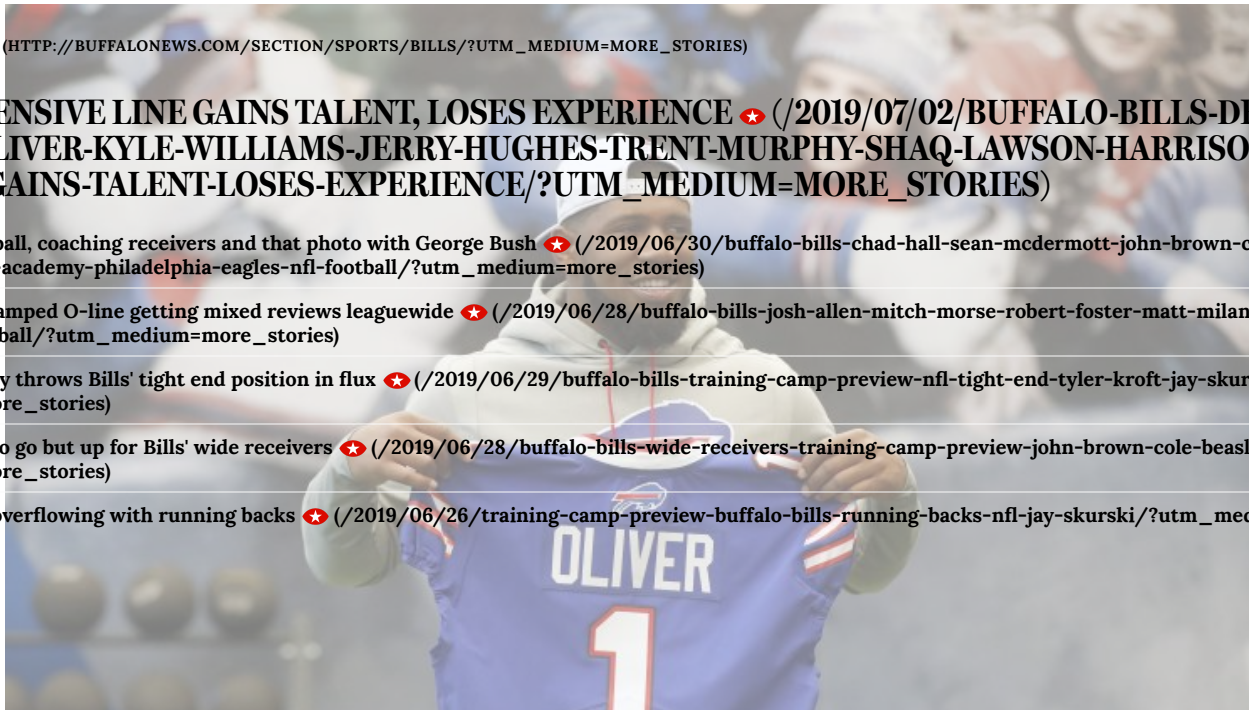
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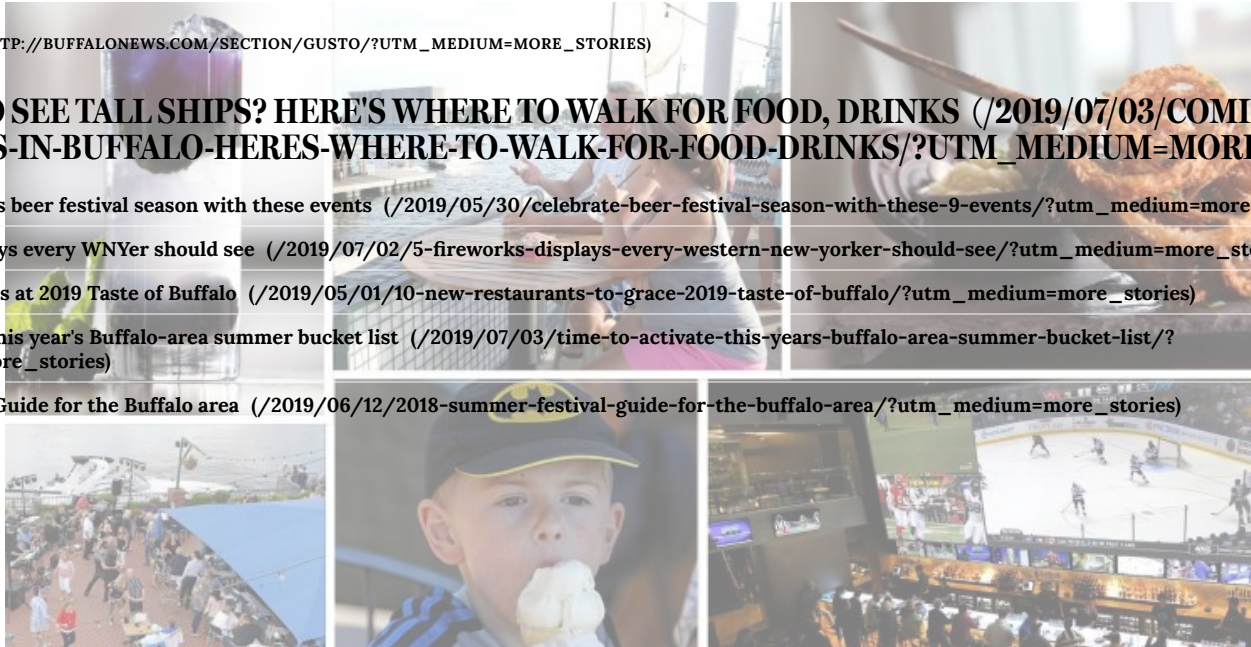
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