

## Justice For Macy: Bill To Increase Repeatedly Driving With Suspended License Penalties

In just a blink of an eye, a Nisswa car crash left a young mother and her four-year-old daughter critically injured and fighting for their lives. The driver of the car found responsible for that crash should have never been on the road after his license was repeatedly suspended. Now, the family of the injured want justice.

“Our story goes back to January 15, 2015.”

It started as a regular day. Wake up, get dressed, have breakfast...

“My grandbaby and my daughter bounced out the door it was a ‘see you later, we’ll meet for dinner.’”

Sue Vanek left the house to start her routine.

“The first thing I heard on the radio was to avoid County Road 3 between Merrifield and Brainerd, because there has been a horrible car accident,” Vanek recalls.

She knew instantly that it was them. Court documents show that her daughter Macy Kujava was driving southbound when a driver in the northbound lane lost control. Vaughn Gentry, then 25 of Barnesville, hit her head-on.

Law enforcement determined Gentry’s car was going 59 miles per hour, too fast for the snowy road conditions.

“My daughter was airlifted from the scene in critical condition with serious head injuries and wounds. They did not think she would survive.”

Her granddaughter, Sophie, would spend 99 days in the ICU, undergoing over 20 surgeries for internal injuries.

“We met with law enforcement at the hospital where they informed me that the driver of the car that hit them was likely speeding, lost control on the road and was unlicensed.”

Gentry has a long history of speeding, reckless driving, and driving after his license was suspended. Just a day prior to the crash, a warrant was issued for his arrest since his privileges were revoked back in November.

“So we were facing someone who blatantly disregards law,” said Vanek.

They found that it was the law itself that was the problem. In Minnesota, driving with a suspended license, no matter how many times you’re caught, is a simple misdemeanor.

“I think the county attorney’s office wanted to make sure something stuck and so they went with those charges,” says Steve Lastovich, the family’s personal injury attorney.

While Gentry spent just a few weeks in jail, Macy Kujava was left in a persistent vegetative state – something that her family doesn’t want anyone else to endure, so they contacted their local representative.

“When you really stop and think about it, these accidents wouldn’t be happening if people were obeying the law,” says District 10A Representative Josh Heintzeman (R).

Through [House File 192](#) and [Senate File 1097](#), they’re looking to create increased penalties for repeat offenders.

“If [the crash] had been passed after Macy’s Bill had been passed, of course, it would have been a gross misdemeanor and he would have done some jail time,” says Lastovich.

But they need the constituents help to get the bill through the senate.

“We’ve definitely run into some challenges as we’ve tried to convince the folks in the senate that this is important. And, I don’t think it’s necessarily because they disagree, but to what level of importance and what do we have to do to actually change behavior and to bring justice,” says Rep. Heintzeman.

Rep. Heintzman says he hopes that the law can be passed during the next legislative session.