

Caretaker pleads guilty in death of autistic woman

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The caretaker whose autistic charge froze to death last year after wandering off while shopping at the Macy's store in Center City pleaded guilty Wednesday before a Philadelphia judge.

Weeping uncontrollably, Hussanatu "Ayesha" Wulu entered the plea to a single count of neglect of a care-dependent person in the death of Christina Sankey, 37.

Under a plea agreement negotiated by Edward McCann, first assistant district attorney, and defense lawyer Gregory J. Pagano, Wulu was immediately sentenced to 11½ to 23 months in prison, followed by three years of probation.

Common Pleas Court Judge Benjamin Lerner then paroled Wulu to electronically monitored house arrest and allowed her to surrender Nov. 30 to begin her sentence.

McCann said Patricia Sankey, the victim's mother, did not feel up to attending the hearing but was satisfied that Wulu was held accountable.

"It's a sad, sad case," said Pagano, adding that Wulu asked McCann to

apologize to Sankey's mother for what happened. Pagano said Wulu had worked with Christina Sankey and her mother for four years and had a close relationship with them.

"She feels terrible, and she hasn't seen the mother since this happened," Pagano added.

Pagano said the conviction means Wulu will never again be able to care for dependent or disabled people.

Wulu, 31, of Southwest Philadelphia, was arrested after a grand jury probe of the circumstances of Sankey's death.

Wulu took Sankey, who was severely disabled and nonverbal, to Macy's around 2:25 p.m. March 6, 2014.

Within minutes, Sankey had wandered away and left the store. Police found her partly clothed body about 6:30 a.m. the next day between two parked cars in the 1400 block of North 57th Street in West Philadelphia.

According to authorities, Wulu called 911 an hour after Sankey went missing.

A medical examiner ruled the cause of death as exposure to the cold.

Prosecutors said that since Wulu, then employed by Casmir Care Services, had cared for Sankey for four years, she should have known not to let her wander away.

Thomas R. Kline, a Philadelphia lawyer who represents Patricia Sankey and settled a wrongful-death claim for an undisclosed amount, said what happened was "unfathomable and indefensible."