

Criminal Justice

Prosecutors Target Drowsy Drivers; Cellphone Usage Records Provide Evidence of Sleep Deprivation

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Prosecutors in more than six states have filed criminal charges against drivers accused of causing accidents in part because they were too sleepy to get behind the wheel.

“The campaign against so-called drowsy driving is moving to the courtroom,” the [New York Times](#) reports, “with law enforcement officials increasingly pushing to hold sleepy drivers criminally accountable when they cause fatal crashes.”

In most states, driver fatigue cases are prosecuted under laws barring reckless or negligent behavior, the Times says. In New Jersey, however, lawmakers passed a targeted bill in 2003 allowing fatigue to be considered in fatal crashes if the driver falls asleep or has been awake for 24 hours in a row.

Jurors in the Bronx are deliberating a case of alleged driver fatigue in the trial of Ophadell Williams, charged with manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide in a bus crash that killed 15 people, the story says. Williams was driving 32 passengers home from a casino when the bus struck a guardrail and flipped over. He says he lost control of the bus when he was cut off by a tractor-trailer, while prosecutors say he was suffering from sleep deprivation.

A sleep disorders specialist had testified for the prosecution that Williams apparently averaged about three hours of sleep a day for three days before the crash. The expert had relied on records showing cellphone use, work logs, rental car records and investigator reports.

Evidence in other cases includes traffic cameras, event data recorders and GPS tracking, the Times says.

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