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## Lake County Jail inmate gets maximum sentence for role in fatal overdose



Jessica Sari, left, listens as her mother, Tamara Sari, right, reads a statement about how heroin has robbed her of her daughter Sept. 22 in Lake County Common Pleas Court. Defense attorneys Barry Doyle and Kevin Cafferkey are seated next to Sari, who snuck heroin into the Lake County Jail via her body cavity Dec. 22, causing the overdose death of fellow inmate Kristi Jean Ellis. Tracey Read — The News-Herald

By Tracey Read, The News-Herald

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A female Lake County Jail inmate who hid heroin in her body cavity after returning from a medical furlough was sentenced Sept. 22 to the maximum 11 years in prison.

Jessica Sari, 23, of Willoughby, distributed the drug to several other inmates Dec. 22 at the Painesville facility.

One of the inmates was Sari's best friend, 25-year-old Kristi Jean Ellis of Mentor. Ellis, a mother of a 5-year-old daughter, died after overdosing at the jail.

Lake County Common Pleas Judge Eugene A. Lucci said Ellis should have been protected from her addiction behind bars.

"The sheriff does his best to create a safe place for people to be rehabilitated," Lucci told Sari. "This shouldn't happen. This can't happen in a jail setting or a prison setting. You tempted other addicts. I'm going to put you in prison for a long time. You need long-term sobriety. I hope nobody brings drugs into that facility and tempts you."

Sari apologized to both her own and the victim's family members for causing Ellis' death.



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"I blame no one but myself," she said. "I miss her so much and I'd bring her back in a second."

Sari said she became an addict eight years ago after the death of her beloved master carpenter father, who died after a doctor overprescribed pain pills for a back injury.

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"I started with alcohol and progressed with heroin," she said. "I have been sober now nine months. I still do get cravings but they are not as intense. I don't want to be stuck this way forever. I want my mother to say she's proud of me, and for the first time, truly mean it."

Tamara Sari, the defendant's mother, could barely speak through her sobs in court.

"It's been a slow torture as we watched Jessica slowly slip away from us," she said. "I pray that we find a sensible solution to the heroin problem that is leaving a trail of brokenhearted families to pick up the pieces."

The defendant's sister, Cala Sari, said her family tried everything to get help for Jessica over the years — including cutting all ties with her at one point.

"It wasn't enough," said the sister. "It's heartbreaking to know she won't be at my wedding next year or see my children be born."

Ellis' sister, Michele Breen, spoke about how she is struggling to forgive the defendant.

"You were trusted to see a doctor and you broke the law," added Breen. "I had to look Kristi's 5-year-old child in the eyes and tell her that mommy was dead."

Defense attorneys Kevin Cafferkey and Barry Doyle requested nine years in prison for Sari, who had no prior felony record.

Cafferkey noted Sari has major depressive disorder and has suffered from PTSD since the age of 15.

At 13, she was sexually abused by a carnival worker who took her out in the woods.

Doyle said Sari — a former A- and B-student and daddy's girl — has been in rehab five times to get help for her severe addictions to opioids, sedatives, alcohol, stimulants and marijuana.

"Sometimes jail is the only way to quit this," Doyle said. "This could end up being a blessing for Jessica."

Assistant County Prosecutor Jacqueline O'Donnell said Sari has a history of misdemeanor offenses, including drug possession and attempted theft.

Sari previously pleaded guilty to one count each of illegal conveyance of drugs of abuse onto the grounds of a detention facility and corrupting another with drugs.

She is the final person to be sentenced in connection with Ellis' death.

Christine Martin, 31, of Mentor, is [serving seven years](#) in prison for distributing the heroin to other jail inmates while she was in jail on a petty theft count.

Michael Beachler, 24, of Parma, is [serving 30 months](#) in prison for supplying the drugs that led to the fatal overdose.

All three co-defendants have been ordered to reimburse Ellis' family back more than \$12,600 for their funeral expenses.

Ellis was in jail awaiting sentencing on a felony theft case when she overdosed.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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