

OAKLAND

'Justice, healing': \$75 million wrongful death verdict goes to college student's family



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A jury has awarded \$75 million to the family of a local college student who died taking what he believed was Adderall but instead was a hallucinogenic stimulant given to him by three other men who recorded the incident on Snapchat.

The verdict awarded Thursday in Wayne County Circuit Court marked a key step for the family of Denis Preka, a 21-year-old student from Grosse Pointe Farms, who died after ingesting the artificial drug Ecstasy in 2019.

Preka was attending the University of Michigan at the time of his death, according to the [Denis Preka Foundation](#) website set up by his family. He had previously studied at University of Detroit Mercy and planned to pursue a career in business law. His death came one day before his 22nd birthday, the website said.

"He was very smart, academic accolades across the board," said Jamie Thom, Preka's stepfather. "He was a dreamer but he was pragmatic, he worked hard. He was a special guy and the world is going to miss him."

Thursday's jury verdict marked the culmination of a yearslong legal battle, with the family and attorneys expressing relief through tears at an emotional news conference Friday morning. Linda and Jamie Thom filed the wrongful death lawsuit in 2020 on behalf of Preka's estate.

"This symbolic verdict has brought a measure of healing to Denis' family and I have witnessed their relief firsthand," said attorney Mike Morse.

According to court documents, Preka had gone to a friend's house in Novi on March 19, 2019, to study for a major exam the next morning and asked for Adderall to help concentrate. Preka was given what he believed to be Adderall but it was actually MDMA, commonly called Ecstasy, the lawsuit alleged. "Ecstasy/MDMA acts as both a stimulant and hallucinogen, producing an energizing effect, distortions in time and perception, and enhanced enjoyment of tactile experiences," according to the DEA's website.

Preka later began suffering side effects and instead of getting him help, the other men began videotaping him and posting it on Snapchat even after he became "incapacitated and unresponsive" on a hallway floor in the house, the lawsuit alleged.

According to the lawsuit, Preka died during the night, but 911 wasn't called until 9 a.m.

Video of the incident will soon be made public and served as key evidence in the case, Morse said. The family said an individual recorded the social media video and provided it to police.

Families should be aware of the risks of drug use, particularly as school returns to session this fall, Morse said.

"As students prepare to return to college, we must emphasize the dangers of drug misuse and the importance of making responsible choices," Morse said.

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Linda and Jamie Thom encouraged youths to foster in-person friendships, not only on social media, and fondly recalled Preka's friendly spirit.

"He was the guy that always sought out the lonely person and attempted to make a connection and he never met a stranger," Jamie Thom said.

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The family is carrying on Preka's legacy with the [Denis Preka Foundation](#), with goals to place Denis friendship benches at local college campuses and provide college students free trips abroad.

"He wanted to do great things, he wanted to help and work with nonprivileged kids living in Detroit," Linda Thom said.

The case is under review of the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, Morse said.