

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla., Oct. 19, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- Florida Federal criminal attorney John P. Contini said Friday that both juvenile girls accused in the bullying death of 12 year old Rebecca Sedwick are eligible to be tried as adults despite their ages.

Sedwick jumped to her death from a third-story building in central Florida September 10 after being "verbally, physically and cyber bullied" in 2012 and 2013 by two classmates who are 12 and 14 years of age, prosecutors said.

A veteran Ft. Lauderdale civil rights defense attorney, Contini described bullying as a heinous crime exacerbated by teenage use of Internet social media and the absence of parental supervision.

"Bullying, especially cyber bullying, are serious crimes. This horrific tragedy is especially cruel given the teenage girls' bragging and lack of remorse in the bullying that resulted in the victim's death. It justifies bringing the charges to adult court," Contini said, noting this case represents a rising national trend and especially in Florida where 70 percent of all daylight crimes are committed by juveniles.

Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd accused the two girls of "maliciously harassing" Sedwick until she took her own life. They were charged with aggravated stalking — a third-degree felony. The names of the defendants have not been released because of their ages.

Although one of the girls has expressed remorse through her attorney, evidence cited by Judd

shows the bullying was extreme. The 14 year old posted on her Facebook Page "yes I bullied Rebecca and she killed herself, but I don't give a (expletive)."

"Bullying isn't confined to the corner like it was even 10 years ago -- now it's the 'corner' of the bedroom where some 12 year old on the computer uses Facebook and social media on the Internet to terrorize their victim, all the way to their death," explains Contini.

"Florida prosecutors will salivate over the prospect of filing adult charges against any juvenile who would brag about bullying a little girl to her death, if for no other reason than to send a message to society at large, for its deterrent effect on all other cyber bullies out there terrorizing our kids."

Even if prosecutors file charges against the teenagers as "adults," Contini further explained, they would be eligible under Florida law for "Youthful Offender" sentencing to any number of Florida prisons that are set aside for younger convicts like themselves, if convicted.

The girls were booked in a juvenile detention center and later released to their parents under house arrest pending completion of the sheriff's investigation of possible bullying, including on the suspects' social media sites.

Contini noted Florida is renowned for charging kids with adult crimes and waiving them over to "adult court" and sentencing them to life in prison.

He cited the similar case of Lionel Tate, 14, who was implicated in a young girl's death. Tate was charged with murder in Broward County as an adult and was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

Contini's legal practice is recognized for successfully representing defendants in State and Federal cases involving murder, drugs, white-collar, sex, and federal crimes.

A former Broward County felony trial prosecutor, Contini has successfully represented thousands of criminal defendants in Florida, Massachusetts and the US for more than 25 years.

Contini is a faith-based legal authority on individual rights and freedoms, and author of several books on crime including "Danger Road: A True Crime Story of Murder and Redemption."

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