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CRIME & COURTS

NC man pleads guilty to giving fentanyl to his 16-year-old girlfriend, killing her

BY MICHAEL GORDON

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A Rutherford County man will serve up to three years in prison after pleading guilty Monday to drug charges related to the September 2022 fentanyl death of his 16-year old Gaston County girlfriend.
GASTON COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

A Rutherford County man pleaded guilty Monday to giving his 16-year-old girlfriend a pain pill laced with fentanyl, leading to her September 2022 death.

In return for his plea, Nicholas Gage Ivey, 19, of Spindale, will serve up to three years in prison. He also has agreed to testify against his co-defendant, Deontae Jaquise Miller, 24, of Rutherfordton.

Both were arrested in connection with the death of Abigail Saunderson, 16, of Gaston County.

At his arraignment Monday, Ivey pleaded guilty to felony conspiracy to sell/deliver a Schedule II controlled substance, and felony conspiracy, District Attorney Travis Page told The Charlotte Observer. He received consecutive sentences of 10-21 months and 6-17 months.

As a condition of his plea, Ivey is expected to testify against Miller, Page said.

The victim's mother, Tracy Saunderson-Ross, told [Observer news partner WSOC](#) that Abigail asked for a pain pill from Ivey, never knowing it contained fentanyl, a powerful narcotic responsible for thousands of deaths in the Carolinas and across the country.

The number of fentanyl-related fatal overdoses in North Carolina has risen from 442 in 2016 to 3,163 in 2021, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services.

On Sept. 26 just before 7 a.m., officers with the Gaston County Police Department found Abigail unconscious near Bessemer City, 10 minutes from Gastonia. [Ivey and Miller were arrested in December.](#)

Abigail's mother told WSOC that she brought a strand of her daughter's hair to court with her on Monday.

“(Abigail) was a little light in everybody's life. Anybody that met her,” she said.



MICHAEL GORDON



704-358-5095

Michael Gordon has been the Observer's legal affairs writer since 2013. He has been an editor and reporter at the paper since 1992, occasionally writing about schools, religion, politics and sports. He spent two summers as “Bikin Mike,” filing stories as he pedaled across the Carolinas.

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