

Woman Receives Probation and House Detention for Groping Fellow Airplane Passenger



Summary: *One woman didn't listen to the advice of what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas by bringing her partying behavior on board the airplane and groping the passenger next to her.*

Everyone's biggest fear of having to sit next to that awkward person on the airplane for any length of a flight came true for one 19-year-old woman. The victim was flying on an Alaska Airlines flight next to 27-year-old Heidi McKinney, who had smuggled alcohol onto the flight, likely added to her inappropriate behavior.

The flight was a relatively short one, flying from Las Vegas to Portland. During that time, however, McKinney managed to touch the breast and genitals of the woman sitting next to her.

McKinney was arrested at the Portland International Airport on May 8, 2016. She pleaded guilty to assault with the intent to commit a felony in March. She has been sentenced to eight months of home detention and three years of probation for her acts. The maximum penalty was 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. She had been originally charged with abusive sexual contact but was allowed to plead guilty to the lesser charge.

Prosecutors and the defense team asked for a three-year probation sentence with a \$3,000 restitution payment but U.S. District Judge Anna J. Brown explained that sentencing guidelines for this offense calls for a home detention. Brown said straying from that sentence would "quite out of line" since "she needs to be held accountable for her crimes first."

McKinney did not speak during the sentencing hearing but wrote a letter of apology to the victim. The victim also prepared a statement was too emotional to speak when the judge motioned her forward. Instead, the victim's grandmother read the remarks. The victim wrote, "I personally don't feel you know how much damage you have caused me. That day you messed with my head and took something from me that I will never get back. What you did was not OK in any shape or form." She blames herself for being too friendly towards McKinney as they were boarding the plane, losing multiple nights of sleep over the incident. She concluded by stating she has forgiven McKinney and hopes she receives the help she needs.

Prosecutor Ravi Sinha argued before the Portland federal court that McKinney "made contact with the victim's body, including her inner thigh, and made a series of profane and lewd statements to the victim." The assistant U.S. attorney added that McKinney acted with "intent to humiliate and harass the victim."

According to the court documents, McKinney took her seat on Flight 621 already drunk. Before the plane even departed, she had already placed her hands on the victim's breasts, apparently "allowing her hands to linger there uncomfortably."

For the remainder of the flight, McKinney bragged about her wealth, proceeding to straddle the victim and tell her she wanted to "f***." When the woman rejected her, she called the other passenger "poor." She also put her arms around the victim and took photos of her. McKinney tried to persuade the victim to drink the alcohol she had smuggled onto the plane. She also licked the victim's ear, tried to kiss her and tried to place her hands on the victim's crotch three separate times. The two were eventually separated for the remainder of the flight until the plane landed and McKinney could be arrested.

McKinney lives in the suburbs of Portland. Her now-husband claims she does not "metabolize alcohol" so "this is what happens when she drinks." After the court hearing in March, she was found unconscious in a bar. She also has previous convictions for drunk driving in 2015 and 2007. Her attorney claims McKinney has struggled with an alcohol addiction since she was a teenager because of her own sexual abuse.

Her attorney asked that McKinney be allowed to leave home to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings plus attend school and church as well as look for a job. Her attorney explained that McKinney completed an inpatient alcohol treatment program last month and is working on finishing an associate's degree program by August in an effort to develop more "appropriate sober relationships with same-age peers."

The conditions of her probation include not being allowed to have guns in the house, drink alcohol, or being involved in her

husband's marijuana business in any way. Brown told McKinney, "Absolute abstinence from alcohol is the requirement for you. You simply cannot drink."

Do you think the punishment fits the crime? Tell us your thoughts in the comments below.

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