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Local News

Defence in human trafficking trial argues teen planned for sex work in Windsor

Doug Schmidt

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A human trafficking trial involving a 17-year-old complainant began Tuesday in Superior Court in Windsor. PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES /Windsor Star

A London teen who agreed to drive with a stranger to Windsor with dreams of becoming a stripper came to the city to make money in the sex trade, a human trafficking trial heard.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

After the prosecution laid out its case of the youth being lured to Windsor and forced into prostitution, it was the defence's turn on Wednesday to discredit the young complainant's story of being confined and held hostage at the hands of two criminally exploitative adults.

“You expected to be doing sex work when you came to Windsor,” Ben Strickland, lawyer for defendant Zuhair Gorges, suggested. “No,” replied the youth, who was 17 at the time.

But the complainant agreed she had discussed “price lists” ahead of agreeing to engaging in oral sex with two older men at a hotel in the hours after arriving in the city late on the night of April 26, 2019. She conceded she was “a little bit thrown off by the men coming to my room,” but still harboured hopes, after being paid for the sex, that she would be introduced the following night to Windsor’s strip clubs and the start of a “glamourized” lifestyle of exotic dancing.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Two Windsor residents are each charged with counts of forcible confinement, hostage taking and theft — Gorges, 46, arrested in April 2019 after Windsor police intervened; and Breyia Latouf, 23 at the time of her arrest the following month. They’re on trial this week before Superior Court Justice Bruce Thomas.

Both Strickland and Linda McCurdy, lawyer for Latouf, caught the youth on a number of contradictions between her sworn trial testimony and what she had previously stated to the police two years ago and at a later preliminary inquiry.

“I was mistaken ... everything is a lot more clear now,” she said at one point during cross-examination by McCurdy. The youth admitted that neither of the accused had ever said she wouldn’t be allowed to return to London or that either had been physical or even threatening towards her.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“I just got a really bad feeling,” the teen testified of the morning after the paid sexual encounters. She said her money was gone and she was exhausted after very little sleep following a night in which she also consumed vodka and cocaine.

“The money was never stolen — you spent your money on cocaine while you were at the hotel,” McCurdy suggested. “No,” replied the youth, whose identity is protected under court order.

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After her night at the hotel the youth was picked up by Latouf and driven to the couple’s city home. It was there the following afternoon, while Gorges and Latouf were asleep, that the girl reached out to her youth worker in London — whom she said knew of the minor’s plan to seek strip club employment — and texted: “I’m so scared ... I’m in some crackhead ghetto hood in Windsor ... I’m so STUPID AND NAIVEEE.”

A short time later, with the two accused sleeping in their bedroom and the youth napping on the couch after her texting, Windsor police officers arrived with loud knocks on the door that afternoon.

The trial continues Thursday with a second day of cross-examination by the defence of the complainant, who is appearing via Zoom from London.

dschmidt@postmedia.com

twitter.com/schmidtcity





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