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# High-profile lawyer joins limo owner's defense team

Diego Mendoza-Moyers and Larry Rulison

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1of78 Joseph Tacopina, attorney for the Le family, speaks to the media outside Superior Court in New Haven, Conn., Thursday, March 17, 2011. Raymond Clark III appeared Thursday to change his plea to guilty to murder and attempted sexual assault in the strangling of 24-year-old Yale University graduate student Annie Le of Placerville, Calif. Her body was found stuffed behind a research lab wall

on the day she was supposed to get married. (AP Photo/Jessica Hill) Jessica Hill



2of78 Ken Moreno, left, awaits Judge Gregory Carro's sentencing with his attorneys Chad Seigel, center, and Joseph Tacopina at State Supreme court, Monday, Aug. 8, 2011, in New York. Moreno, 43, a former New York City police officer, convicted of official misconduct but acquitted of raping a woman, was sentenced Monday to a year in jail. Moreno and another officer, Franklin Mata, 29, were fired from the police department within hours of their convictions in May. (AP Photo/ Louis Lanzano) Louis Lanzano



3of78Attorney Lee Kindlon talks to reporters after his client Nauman Hussain was released on bail from Cobleskill Town court after his arraignment Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018. Hussain, a limousine service operator, was charged Wednesday with criminally negligent homicide in a crash that killed 20 people, while police continued investigating what caused the wreck and whether anyone else will face charges. (AP Photo/Hans Pennink)

A well-known attorney has joined the defense team for Nauman Hussain, the limo owner charged with criminally negligent homicide in connection with the Oct. 6 limo crash in Schoharie County that killed 20 people.

Albany lawyer Lee Kindlon has represented Hussain since he was first charged, and confirmed on Saturday he will be working with lawyer Joe Tacopina "hand-in-hand to defend Nauman and Prestige Limo," he said, in reference to the limo company Nauman and his father Shahed own.

"Clearly we understand that this case is going to move into a different phase, and it was a decision just to beef up the defense team and make sure we have all hands on deck," Kindlon said.

Tacopina has represented clients like Philadelphia rapper Meek Mill, former New York Yankees star Alex Rodriguez, and Joran Van Der Slout, a suspect in Natalee Holloway's 2005 disappearance.

The New York Post first reported his addition to Hussain's defense team.

Tacopina told the Times Union Saturday evening he understood the "emotional undertones" of the case, but said there was a rush to judgment made in the days following the accident.

"There's been a lot of things put out there that have just been factually inaccurate - flat out wrong. Clearly people were looking for a scapegoat. The driver was dead, and they're turning to the owner of the company. These guys did absolutely nothing wrong," Tacopina said. "He believed these vehicles were roadworthy."

Tacopina described Kindlon as a "phenomenal lawyer" and confirmed he would be working on the case "with Lee, not replacing Lee."

Tacopina's addition comes as the National Transportation Safety Board received access to inspect the limousine after months of back-and-forth between the NTSB and Schoharie County District Attorney Susan Mallery.

Under the agreement, NTSB investigators this week will be allowed to visually inspect and photograph the vehicle, which is sitting on a jack lift at the State Police Troop G headquarters in Latham.

State Police will then be allowed to remove and examine the vehicle's transmission and torque converter, and NTSB investigators can conduct a hands-on investigation within two weeks after that.

State Police investigators took control of the limousine after the crash at the Apple Barrel Country Store at the intersection of Routes 30 and 30A. The NTSB has been kept from examining the wreckage while state investigators pursue their own criminal investigation of the crash.

But the fight to prevent NTSB from inspecting the vehicle raises questions about the case, Tacopina said.

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"Why try to keep (the NTSB) out of this unless you were worried about their findings? That speaks volumes to the concerns of the prosecutor in this case," Tacopina said, describing the NTSB as the "premier accident investigative agency in the world."

"There'd be no reason, if you want to get to the bottom of the facts, to try to preclude them from getting information," he said.

Nauman Hussain was charged four days after the fatal crash - not enough time to properly inspect the vehicle and find a cause of the accident, according to Tacopina.

Investigators "could not have done a complete inspection of the vehicle, but yet they came to some conclusion that he was at fault," he said.

Kindlon said Tacopina joining the defense team and the NTSB getting access to the limo are unrelated and happened independently.

"The NTSB doesn't exist in a criminal context, their access to the limo happened concurrently with us trying to put together some resources for (Hussain's) defense," he said.

The Hussain family approached Tacopina to assist in Nauman's legal defense, though the Manhattan lawyer wouldn't confirm if he had spoken directly with Shahed, the enigmatic former FBI informant who has been in Pakistan since before the crash took place.

Tacopina's partner, Chad Siegel, will also be assisting in the defense.

"I think (the Hussains) realize, at this point, that this isn't going to go away any time soon," Tacopina said. "They're now preparing themselves for the next phase of this battle."