SUPREME COURT OF CANADA

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Case in Brief: *R. v. Lafferty*

Judgment of November 10, 2026 | On appeal from the Court of Appeal for the Northwest Territories
Neutral citation: 2026 SCC 38

The Supreme Court of Canada upholds a woman's conviction for dangerous driving causing death.

Hannah Lafferty was charged with dangerous driving causing the death of Germaine Mantla. In April 2022, Ms. Lafferty drove a man she was dating to his ex-girlfriend's apartment in Yellowknife and waited for him in her truck. The man's ex-girlfriend approached the truck and opened the driver's door. Ms. Lafferty drove away while the woman stood on the truck's running board and held onto a handle above the open door. Ms. Lafferty accelerated and swerved in an attempt to shake her off. The open door struck Mr. Mantla, who happened to be standing nearby. He died from his injuries.

At trial, Ms. Lafferty argued that she had acted in self-defence because she believed the other woman would hurt her. The judge accepted that Ms. Lafferty believed she was threatened but found that her belief was unreasonable. She also concluded that her driving was an unreasonable response to the perceived threat. The judge rejected her claim of self-defence and convicted her of dangerous driving causing death. Ms. Lafferty appealed her conviction.

A majority of the Court of Appeal for the Northwest Territories dismissed the appeal. The majority found that the trial judge had correctly applied the law of self-defence. It explained that the judge had properly considered whether Ms. Lafferty's belief that the other woman would hurt her was reasonable, rather than whether she was facing a threat of physical harm. The majority also found no error in the judge's conclusion that Ms. Lafferty's driving was an unreasonable response to the perceived threat.

One judge disagreed. He would have allowed the appeal and ordered a new trial. In his view, the trial judge had interpreted the meaning of "force" in the law of self-defence too narrowly. He explained that force could include actions intended to compel someone to do something against their will, even without a threat of physical harm.

The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal.

As such, the conviction for dangerous driving causing death remains in place.

Chief Justice Wagner read the judgment of the unanimous Court. View the video recording of the judgment.

A print version of the judgment that was read out will be available on the Judgments on appeals page once finalized.

Breakdown of the decision: A unanimous Court dismissed the appeal (Chief Justice Wagner and Justices Rowe, Kasirer, Moreau and O'Bonsawin agreed)

Lower court rulings: Conviction (Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories) | Appeal (Court of Appeal for the Northwest Territories)

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