

# Judge Bans Actress From Driving After NYPD Waives Charges in Cyclist Death

By [Janon Fisher](#) | August 18, 2016 9:57am

BROOKLYN HEIGHTS — An aspiring actress who fatally struck a cyclist while lost and distracted by her cellphone was barred by a judge from driving in New York — despite police letting her drive away from the scene without charges. Caitlin Venedam, 28, who does standup comedy and had a bit part as "Chastity" in the TV series "Gossip Girl," was never charged with a crime after running down Matthew Brenner, 29, about 9:30 p.m. on July 6, 2014.

But state Administrative Law Judge Regina A. Rinaldi concluded after a legally mandated inquiry into the deadly crash earlier this year that "a contributing factor in Matthew Brenner's death was [Venedam's] failure to exercise due care to avoid striking [the cyclist]." Rinaldi barred Venedam from driving in New York state, effective in March. She is still licensed to drive in her home state of New Jersey. The case was settled out of court, but during deposition, Venedam admitted she was harried and distracted just before the crash.

"But for our civil suit, certain things would never have been brought to light, including that she was using Google Maps to guide her," said Daniel Flanzig, the lawyer for Brenner's estate, said that the actress would still be on New York's roads were it not for information uncovered in a civil suit. "That should have been used by [NYPD's Collision Investigation Squad]. The Administrative Law Judge would never have had the evidence necessary to revoke her license. The CIS work alone was completely insufficient." The NYPD did not respond to a request for comment. The actress told lawyers in a formal deposition that she was coming from her home in Point Pleasant, N.J., and was rushing to pick up a friend at LaGuardia, but ended up driving away from the airport on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

Venedam got off the highway at Sands Street to call her friend and consult Google Maps on her cellphone because she was lost. With her phone still open to Google Maps sitting on the passenger seat, Venedam drove down the street and veered across a safety triangle in order to make it back on to the BQE, according to the report.

The actress maintained during a deposition that she was traveling between 25 and 30 mph and was using audio prompts from the location app. A video of the crash shows the actress trailing close behind a car that veered out of the way to avoid Brenner, then she smashed into the cyclist in the safety triangle as he tried to make his way to a bike path on the other side of the entrance ramp. She said she was unaware of what she'd hit.

"The windshield was smashed and the car stopped," she told lawyers. "I knew I hit something." Police originally blamed Brenner for riding his bike across the ramp to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, but the video shows he was not in the roadway. Venedam admitted that she never went over to see if the cyclist was OK because other motorists that had stopped were already trying to help him. "The people that had stopped kind of ushered me away as soon as I got out of the car," she said.

Venedam has been cited four times from 2006 to 2012 for unsafe driving, speeding, not wearing a seat belt and blocking traffic, according to NJ Motor Vehicle Commission records.

Flanzig said that criminal charges would be difficult to bring against her because distracted driver statutes require the driver to be holding the cellphone. Brenner's mother Franci Brenner said that she forgives the actress, but she would have liked to see a more thorough investigation at the scene of the accident. "She did not set out to kill someone that day," she said. "I hope this is a lesson learned."

Venedam did not respond to multiple requests for comments. Her lawyer also declined to comment.