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Nicole Paquette arrest for trafficking cocaine

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Lawrence Superior Court Judge Leila Kern said it was a tough sentence to impose on Nicole Paquette, 31. Until her 2006 arrest for trafficking cocaine, Paquette only had a car accident on her record. Haverhill mother of four will spend the next 15 years in prison, convicted of trafficking more than \$1 million worth of cocaine found in a rented minivan. "It's not an understatement to say I spent a sleepless night. I did," Kern said during yesterday's sentencing. Paquette's 2006 arrest led to what police Chief John Romero described then as the largest cocaine bust ever seen in the area. Between the 21 kilos found in Paquette's rental car and another 30 kilos seized from a Methuen home linked to the crime, the drugs had a street value of \$2.5 million, Romero said at the time. The cocaine was brought into the courtroom during the trial — the most the judge said she had ever seen. Kern said it was an amount that "in my years on the bench, I have never seen in one place at one time." Police said the drugs were discovered Sept. 12, 2006, the day after Paquette's codefendant, Angel Ayala Roque, returned a rented Chrysler minivan and workers found the cocaine packed in boxes. Police posed as an employee of the rental business and called Paquette to come get the boxes she left behind. When she returned, she was arrested along with Roque, 45. At Roque's home in Methuen, police found the additional 30 kilos as well as \$123,500 in cash. Roque's trial on the same charges is expected to begin March 17. He also will face an additional charge of cocaine trafficking. Paquette's lawyer, Murat Erkan of Andover, said his client had only a "minimal role" in the drug operation and she did not know whether the closed, unmarked boxes contained cocaine or marijuana. He argued the 15-year sentence was too harsh and asked the judge to reduce the jury's verdict to guilty of trafficking over 14 grams of cocaine, rather than 200 grams. Trafficking over 14 grams carries a sentence of three years; trafficking over 200 grams carries a mandatory 15-year sentence. Kern said Erkan made a powerful argument, but her "hands are tied" by the law and the sentencing requirement. The judge also sentenced Paquette to five to 10 years for her conviction of conspiracy to violate drug laws, also related to this case. Paquette will serve that time concurrently with the 15 years, meaning she will see no additional jail time. Paquette wept throughout the hearing. She wore a black, pinstripe suit and wiped tears from her face. Several supporters in the room sobbed when the judge ordered the sentence. The supporters declined to comment outside the courtroom.

Paquette will spend the sentence at MCI-Framingham, but her attorney said he has filed an appeal.



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