

claimed to be pregnant at the time of Finch's death, was being beaten by Finch when he lunged at her and impaled himself on a butcher's knife. Medical records prove that Finch, who suffered the lingering effects of a traumatic brain injury, was prone to violent outbursts, the defense claimed.

Dr. Kenneth Selig, a forensic psychiatrist hired by the defense to evaluate Willette, bolstered the defense's theory. At the sentencing, Selig said he felt compelled to speak on his patient's behalf, whom he believed to be a victim as much as Finch.

Prosecutors suggested that Selig violated the ethical standards of a forensic evaluator by acting as an advocate in the case.

Assistant State's Attorney Kevin Doyle said the issue raised in Willette's appeal was already decided by the trial judge, who properly ruled that Willette could not change her plea simply because she changed her mind.

Doyle argued the physical evidence supports the state's contention that Willette was the aggressor when Finch was fatally stabbed in the heart.

Ruling there were not legally sufficient grounds to warrant a change of plea, Grogins said Willette was aware of the repercussions when she pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of manslaughter. She was originally charged with murder.

Convict appeals decision in killing

Judge would not allow plea change

By **Tucker McCormack**
Register Staff

MILFORD — A West Haven woman sentenced last month to 17 years in prison for stabbing her boyfriend to death is appealing her conviction.

The appeal filed on behalf of Charissa Willette, 20, challenges the decision of Judge Jack L. Grogins to deny Willette's motion to change her manslaughter plea in the killing last year of Kevin Finch, 25.

The defense motion was denied Jan. 11 by Grogins, who ruled the physical evidence against Willette was too overwhelming to support the defense theory that Finch's stabbing was an accident.

Willette's appeal is being handled by Susan Zitser, a lawyer for the appellate division of the Office of the Public Defender in Hamden. It will be argued before the three-judge Appellate Court in Hartford.

Zitser could not be reached Wednesday for comment.

At the time of the sentencing, Willette's attorney, Tara Knight of New Haven, requested that her client be allowed to change her plea because Grogins appeared unwilling to consider mitigating factors that were cause for a more lenient sentence.

Knight said her client, who