

Your Region

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Victim's parents protest sentence

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BRIDGEPORT — It's been almost a year since Rafael Garcia

was assassinated in Bridgeport, but his parents haven't given up hope that his killers will be caught.

On Friday, they pressed their case for answers during the sentencing of Carmen Cotto, one of the last people to see their son alive. They received no satisfaction.

Cotto was fined \$900 and sen-

tenced to three months' in prison. Upon her release, she will be confined to her home for the first three months of a three-year supervised release.

Earlier this year, she pleaded guilty to possessing a firearm with an altered serial number. The firearm was found in her leased Ford Explorer, in which Garcia was shot to death last August. The gun was not used in the shooting.

U.S. District Judge Janet Hall allowed Cotto, 28, to remain free on \$125,000 bond until June 30.

"Three months is peanuts," Rafael Garcia Sr. said after the sentencing. "She's involved deeply in my son's murder. She's lying to everyone. ... All five girls in the car set him up."

Assistant U.S. Attorney James I. Glasser, who prosecuted Cotto, said, "In my sense, she's aware of what happened and [is] not releasing any information."

Rafael Garcia, 26, was shot to death on Aug. 23 as he sat in Cotto's Explorer with Cotto and four other women. The six had just left

a disco and stopped on Harral Avenue, where a gunman fired several shots into Garcia. No one has been arrested in the killing.

Following the shooting, a police search turned up the gun in Cotto's make-up case, leading to the charge against her. Her lawyer, Tara Knight, said Cotto had found the gun in her car the morning before the shooting and hid it in the case.

Knight said the gun was not Cotto's and said her client won't speculate about who owned it. Federal investigators believe

Garcia may have been slain by members of a family with ties to Cotto, who has twice been indicted for drug trafficking.

Glasser said Cotto had a "four-bag-a-day" marijuana habit, which was costing her as much as \$280 a week. With her cell phone costs, her leased car and expenses for her children, he wondered how she was making ends meet earning \$9 an hour at an emissions testing center.

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