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## BLENDEN ASKING FOR LOWER BAIL

*BRAD BRANNNAN THE SUN HERALD*

Brandon Corey Blenden says he can't afford to appeal his felony drunken-driving conviction to the state Supreme Court, so the state is paying \$5,400 for his attorney.

But his family says they've raised almost \$5,000 to get him out of jail while he waits for the Supreme Court decision. Circuit Court Judge John Whitfield is expected to rule within a week on the Blenden family's request Friday that his bond be lowered. Ann Lee, who lost her 4-year-old daughter, Whitney, when Blenden slammed a truck into the rear of her car on Super Bowl Sunday 1995, asked the judge not to reduce the bond. "If he can't afford his attorney's fees," she asked, "then how can he afford to post bond?"

Attorney **Wayne Woodall** argued that the 21-year-old Blenden's behavior since the killing shows he wouldn't be a threat to others and would return to jail if he lost his appeal.

Since he was jailed over two years ago, Blenden has been escorted under guard to speak to church, school and other groups about the dangers of drinking and driving.

"Out of my 43 years as pastor," said Edgar Jackson of Pass Road Baptist Church, "he's shown more repentance than anyone I've dealt with."

At one point, Blenden even impressed Lee, who appeared with him a few times to give speeches, and told national media outlets about how she had forgiven him.

But her impression of him has diminished, in part because he is trying to get out of jail.

"I have forgiven him. But I still hold him responsible for killing Whitney, and I think he should still be held accountable," said Lee, who was dressed in black and wore a heart-shaped pendant that held Whitney's picture.

Blenden, once considered a model prisoner, has also upset Bill Haden, warden at the Harrison County jail.

Blenden failed to clean the bathroom in the administrative office despite repeated requests that he do so, Haden testified Friday. Haden wrote him up for violating jail rules.

"I told him that I didn't want to see it dirty again," Haden said. "He replied that he wasn't a janitor."

But Blenden testified that he was never told about problems with the bathroom. He also says that Haden threatened him with physical harm, a charge Haden denies.

Blenden hopes Whitfield will reduce his bail from \$250,000 to \$100,000. A bonding company has agreed to put up the standard 10 percent, or \$10,000, for his release if the Blendens pay half now and the rest later.

**Woodall** defended his request to have the state pay his legal bills for the appeal, saying, ``His family didn't have the money back then." Whitfield ruled in December that the state should pay \$5,400 for the appeal work.

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