

FRIENDS ON BRIDGE SAY THEY HELPED

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After several witnesses testified that Martell Welch Jr. brutally beat **Deletha Word** on the Belle Isle bridge, two of Welch's friends took the stand Wednesday and gave a kinder version of what happened that August night.

One broke **Word**'s fall on the sidewalk. Another tried to stop him from doing further harm. A third smashed the woman's car window and bent its frame in an effort to soothe his livid pal.

At least that was the way Lehjuan Jones and Henry Burch saw it. They were with Welch on the night police say he beat **Word** until she jumped off the bridge and drowned.

Welch is charged with murder in a case that has attracted international news media coverage.

Two others who were with Welch on Belle Isle that night are scheduled to testify today. They have also been granted immunity.

Burch, who was in Welch's car, said the incident began just before 2 a.m., when Welch backed out of a parking spot on the island and was clipped by **Word**'s car. **Word** never stopped and Welch gave chase, trying to memorize her license plate number, Jones said.

As **Word** neared the bridge, Jones said, she was slowed by heavy traffic and put the car in reverse, hitting Welch's car a second time. Other witnesses said that when Welch finally caught up with her, he pulled her out of the car and beat her.

Jones, who was granted immunity from prosecution in exchange for his testimony, admitted to smashing in **Word**'s side window and bending the window frame backward.

"I felt that if I did that, he wouldn't feel as bad that his car was messed up," Jones said with a shrug.

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