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Van-accident lawsuit settles for \$2.7 million

Pace contractor fell asleep before crash that killed woman

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A \$2.7 million settlement has been reached in the case of a woman who was killed last year while being transported by a driver contracted with Pace Suburban Bus service.

On March 8, 2013, Ella Mae Williams, a 58-year-old Southwest Side resident, headed to a computer class at Malcolm X College.

Due to numerous medical problems, including congestive heart failure, obesity and insulin dependency for diabetes, she requested a ride to the class. LeRoy F. Stevenson of SCR Medical Transportation, a Pace subcontractor, picked her up in a minivan.

Williams sat in the passenger seat while Stevenson drove southbound on Halsted Street. Unexpectedly, the vehicle swerved off the road and struck a light pole near 46th Street.

An onboard video camera provided footage showing

Stevenson apparently falling asleep at the wheel before the accident.

Williams suffered blunt trauma, including a skull fracture, spinal cord injuries and multiple rib fractures.

Chicago Fire Department paramedics were unable to detect her pulse at the scene. She was declared dead on arrival at Stroger Hospital.

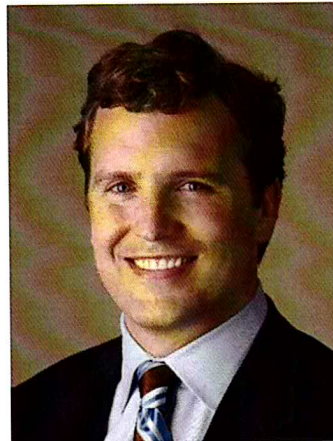
Williams, who weighed 374 pounds, could not use a seatbelt because of her size, said Edward W. McNabola, a partner at McNabola Law Group.

In May 2013, McNabola filed a wrongful-death suit in Cook County Circuit Court on behalf of Williams' daughter, LaShanda, against Pace Suburban Bus, SCR Medical Transportation and Stevenson.

The complaint alleged that the defendants, including Stevenson, carelessly and negligently operated the van and that Stevenson drove it into the pole.

"This case is a tragic example of how fatigued driving can devastate a family," McNabola said.

McNabola said Stevenson initially told police officers that a dog ran in front of the van and that he swerved to avoid hitting the animal. But the video showed



Edward W. McNabola

otherwise.

"The video was critical in establishing what actually happened," McNabola said.

On Wednesday, Circuit Judge John H. Ehrlich dismissed the case due to the settlement reached in a second mediation session with Joseph N. Casciato. *LaShanda Williams, etc. v. Pace Suburban Bus, et al.*, No. 13 L 5803.

The settlement will be paid by two insurers for SCR Medical Transportation.

"This is a hollow victory for the Williams family because unlike SCR Transportation, which can go about its business,

Ella's daughter will have to deal with this tragic loss for the rest of her life," McNabola said.

Ruth M. Degnan, with McNabola Law Group, also represented Williams' estate.

Todd E. Carlson, a lawyer with Grant & Fanning, represented SCR Transportation. He declined to comment about the settlement.

Stevenson was convicted of three traffic violations as a result of the accident — speeding, negligent driving and improper seat belt usage — a spokeswoman for the Illinois secretary of state's office said. His commercial driver's license was also canceled for one year, ending on Feb. 28, 2015.

Pace, which was not involved in the settlement, issued a statement about the case through a spokesman.

"We are very sorry that this tragic incident occurred and extend our deepest sympathies to the friends and family of Ms. Williams," the statement says.

"Safety is our agency's number one priority and we remain committed to working with our employees and contractors to ensure the highest level of safety is maintained for our customers and others with whom we share the roads."