



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
JACKSON COUNTY, OREGON

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DISTRICT ATTORNEY
CRIMINAL DIVISION

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MEDIA RELEASE
for immediate release

The Jackson County District Attorney's Office announced this morning that after a thorough review of the evidence collected, by Oregon State Police and the Medford Police Department, concerning the death of vehicle passenger Michelle Lauritzen, date of birth 06/12/69, no criminal charges will be filed. After reviewing the evidence there is insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt reckless or criminally negligent conduct upon Steven Coleman, the driver of the vehicle involved in Ms. Lauritzen's death.

On September 8, 2014, at approximately 5:24pm Mr. Coleman was driving southbound on Interstate-5 at approximately milepost 44. Construction crews were working in this area of the Interstate and the two lanes began merging into one lane. The posted speed limit was 50 mph, and traffic started to back up and slow. Mr. Coleman stated he saw the construction signs so he disengaged his cruise control that was set at 70 mph, started coasting, and began trying to merge. While doing this he looked over his shoulder in his attempt to merge and the next thing he remembered was that his airbags went off and he was facing the wrong direction. Mr. Coleman struck the rear of the car that Ms. Lauritzen was riding in, causing a chain reaction resulting in damage to three other cars. The driver of Ms. Lauritzen's car estimated he was traveling at approximately 50 mph and was slowing for traffic when the collision occurred. Ms. Lauritzen suffered severe trauma to her neck due to the impact of the collision, and died on scene.

The scene of the crash was investigated by the Oregon State Police, and a crash reconstructionist was used to collect evidence. This trooper marked roadway evidence, photographed the scene and vehicles, reviewed the statements collected by other investigators, and constructed a diagram of the scene. The conclusion of his investigation was that Mr. Coleman was going too fast when he attempted a lane change for the conditions in that stretch of the Interstate.

Mr. Coleman was contacted by the initial troopers on scene, and no signs of alcohol and/or controlled substance impairment was noticed. Later, Mr. Coleman consented to a drug recognition evaluation, conducted by a Medford Police Officer. The Medford Officer saw no signs of alcohol and/or controlled substance impairment.

Although Mr. Coleman was operating his vehicle at an unsafe speed for the conditions, his conduct is not egregious enough to rise to the level of recklessness or criminal negligence. This terrible accident was preventable, as many are, but the actions are not sufficient to prove criminal culpability. However, the District Attorney's Office will be forwarding this case back to Oregon State Police with a recommendation that specific traffic violation citation(s) be issued to Mr. Coleman.

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