



THE FLORIDA SENATE
SPECIAL MASTER ON CLAIM BILLS

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408 The Capitol

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DATE	COMM	ACTION
12/1/01	SM	Favorable
01/23/02	TR	Favorable
	FT	

January 18, 2002

The Honorable John M. McKay
President, The Florida Senate
Suite 409, The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

Re: **SB 16 (2002)** – Senator Al Lawson
HB 227 – Representative Dwight Stansel
Relief of Patsy Baucco

SPECIAL MASTER'S FINAL REPORT

THIS IS AN EQUITABLE CLAIM FOR \$550,000 BASED UPON A SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CLAIMANT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO COMPENSATE THE CLAIMANT FOR INJURIES SHE SUFFERED IN A MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT INVOLVING HER VEHICLE AND A FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION VEHICLE DRIVEN BY THOMAS PORTER.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The Accident: On April 27, 1998, 68-year-old Patsy Baucco and her husband were traveling south in the left lane on SR 93 (I-75) near Ocala, Florida. Mr. Baucco was driving and Mrs. Baucco was seated in the front passenger's seat. Mr. and Mrs. Baucco were wearing seatbelts and were traveling at the posted speed limit of 70 miles per hour. Thomas Porter, an employee of the Department of Transportation, was in his vehicle, which was located on the right shoulder of southbound SR 93. While attempting to access the emergency turnover in the median by crossing the three southbound lanes of SR 93 from the far right shoulder, Mr. Porter's vehicle collided with the Baucco's vehicle. Patsy Baucco suffered permanent injuries as a result of this collision.

Liability: Mr. Porter was charged and pled guilty to violating s. 316.085 (2), F.S., which states the following: "No vehicle shall be driven from a direct course in any lane on any highway until the driver has determined that the vehicle is not being approached or passed by any other vehicle in the lane or on the side to which the driver desires to move and that the move can be completely made with safety and without interfering with the safe operation of any vehicle approaching from the same direction." A violation of this section is a noncriminal traffic infraction, punishable as a moving violation as provided in ch. 318, F.S. On June 4, 1998, Thomas Porter was adjudicated guilty and paid a civil penalty of \$500 plus \$18 in court costs.

At his deposition, Mr. Porter accepted total and complete responsibility for causing the accident and offered no mitigating circumstances. Upon stipulation by the plaintiffs and the department, the court granted the plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment on the issue of liability as a matter of law.

The department suspended Mr. Porter for 2 workweeks without pay.

Damages: Mrs. Bauccho was life-flighted from the scene of the accident to Ocala's Monroe Regional Medical Center where her injuries were stabilized after losing four-fifths of her blood. The next day Mrs. Bauccho was transferred to Orlando Regional Health Care where she received treatment for the following injuries:

- Four fractures of her pelvis
- Several breaks in her right wrist
- Comminuted fracture of her right tibia
- Comminuted fracture of her right fibula
- Comminuted fracture of her right femur
- Comminuted fracture of her left tibia
- Comminuted fracture of her left fibula
- Fracture of her big toe
- Fracture of her left ring finger

During her 18-day hospital stay in Orlando, Mrs. Bauccho received five surgical procedures. Mrs. Bauccho was transferred to the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio where she spent the next 2 weeks being evaluated. Thereafter, she spent 3

months in a custodial care facility waiting for her injuries to heal. Mrs. Bauccho subsequently received two additional surgical procedures relating to her injuries and underwent rehabilitation therapy twice a week for a year. Today, Mrs. Bauccho is able to walk short distances with the assistance of a cane and longer distances with the assistance of either a walker or wheel chair.

Mrs. Bauccho's medical expenses total approximately \$145,429, to date. Of these medical expenses, \$42,423.46 is subject to a reimbursement lien.

Evidence was presented that Mrs. Bauccho's life expectancy is 85.5 years. The projected lifetime medical care ranges from \$270,986 to \$485,197, including a probability she will need two additional surgical procedures in the future to replace her left knee and right hip.

Legal Proceedings: Mr. and Mrs. Bauccho filed suit against the department. After Summary Judgment against the department on the issue of liability, Mr. and Mrs. Bauccho and the parties signed a Stipulated Settlement Agreement dated January 25, 2001, requiring the department to pay the sum of \$200,000, and requiring the department to support a claim bill solely on behalf of Patsy Bauccho in the amount of \$550,000. No annuities or other financial products were required to be purchased by the department. The department has subsequently paid the \$200,000 and the suit against the department has been dismissed.

Additional Sources of Income: In addition to the \$200,000 mentioned above, Mr. and Mrs. Bauccho received \$10,000 from their insurance company for personal injury protection coverage and \$10,000 in property damage coverage.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

Competent and Substantial Evidence: There is competent and substantial evidence to support a finding of causation and liability on the part of the department and to support the damages of the claimant in the amount of \$550,000.

I conclude Mr. Porter did not exercise due care in violation of s. 316.085(2), F.S. I further conclude the actions of Thomas Porter, an employee of the department who was acting within the scope of his employment, resulted in the permanent injuries and damages to Patsy Bauccho.

I further conclude the parties' settlement agreement adequately compensates Mrs. Bauccho for her injuries.

ATTORNEYS FEES:

Attorney's fees are limited to 25 percent of recovery pursuant to the provisions of s. 768.28, F.S. Attorney's fees and costs are included in the settlement amount.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

The subject matter of this claim bill was considered during the 2001 Legislative Session as SB 244, which the Special Master recommended favorably with one amendment. The bill died on the Senate Calendar. Upon the filing of SB 16 for the 2002 Legislative Session, the parties were given the opportunity to supplement the previous record but declined to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based upon the foregoing, I recommend that Senate Bill 16 be reported FAVORABLY.

Respectfully submitted,

Reynold Meyer
Senate Special Master

cc: Senator Al Lawson
Representative Dwight Stansel
Faye Blanton, Secretary of the Senate
Stephanie Birtman, House Special Master