

Family of Gainesville woman killed in crash settles case with trucking company for \$10 million



The Ford Expedition carrying Steven Haynes, of Monticello, and Taliah Freeman, 32, of Gainesville, was hit April 23, 2016, on Interstate-85 near Pleasant Hill Rd. The lawyers representing them were able to secure a \$10 million settlement. Provided by Matt Cook

[Nick Watson](#)

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A North Carolina trucking company and its insurer have settled a case for \$10 million involving a Gainesville woman killed in a crash in 2016 on Interstate 85.

Taliah Freeman, 32, of Gainesville, was killed in an April 23, 2016, wreck in Gwinnett County after a chain-reaction collision. Nearly eight years later while the jury was deliberating the case, the parties reached a settlement, with roughly 95% of it going toward Freeman's family.

The case was brought by Freeman's mother, Sandra Gallo, on behalf of Freeman's son, who was 6 years old at the time of her death. The defendants were C&T Durham Trucking Company, of Greensboro, North Carolina, and ACE American Insurance Company.

"To see the insurance company finally acknowledge responsibility with this payment, after presenting a mean-spirited, meritless defense was satisfying for our clients," attorney Matt Cook said in a statement.



The plaintiffs were represented by Cook, Shane Lazenby, Nathan Nicholson, Josh Bearden, Jon Greer, Brittany Rowe and Walter Rucker.

Defense attorney Marc Bardack did not return a request for comment.

Gwinnett County Police responded around 4:40 a.m. April 23, 2016, to I-85 north of Pleasant Hill Road.

Police said Steven Haynes, of Monticello, was driving a Ford Expedition northbound with Freeman as a passenger. Randell Trice, of North Carolina, was driving a tractor-trailer two lanes to the right of Haynes when the two collided.

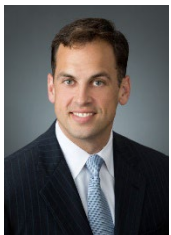
Haynes and Freeman exited the car "because they believed it may catch on fire," according to their attorneys, when a Brookhaven driver struck the Expedition and both of them.

Freeman died at the scene, while Haynes was transported to Gwinnett Medical Center and suffered a broken ankle. Haynes was also a plaintiff in the case.

The Brookhaven driver was dismissed from the case at the trial pursuant to a confidential agreement, Cook said.

Lazenby said their highest offer before trial was \$1.5 million, but that increased to \$7 million and eventually the final amount while the jury had the case to decide.

The attorneys said their accident reconstruction expert was instrumental in their case, showing that the tractor trailer was in the middle of changing lanes while the Expedition was firmly in its lane.



"The jury appreciated him putting all the puzzle pieces together and really proving that our theory of the case was the accurate one," Lazenby said

One of the defenses attempted, Lazenby said, was that Taliah as a pedestrian "could be held partially responsible" for not getting out of the roadway quick enough.

"Everybody understands very clearly that money can't ever replace a loved one like Taliah, but at least it provided her with an opportunity to both get closure and to prove that Taliah bore no responsibility," Lazenby said.

Cook said he was "**proud to represent the local folks in complicated cases and get to the truth.**"