



Somerset County Auto Case Nets \$1.2 Million For Woman's Spinal Injuries

In her Somerset County suit, *Lezcano v. Coleman*, Maria Lezcano, 46, of Bernardsville, is to be paid \$1.2 million for injuries she sustained after another car struck hers. The settlement was reached on June 2.

Liability was not disputed, according to Lezcano's attorney, **Michael T. Heck** of **Epstein Ostrove** in Edison. Heck's colleague and managing partner **Daniel N. Epstein** was designated trial counsel.

"This is a fantastic settlement for Miss Lezcano," Heck said in a phone call. "This accident happened in September 2016, and we've been fighting hard for her. It's amazing to bring to conclusion a difficult part of Miss Lezcano's life."

Defendants Grace and Dennis Coleman were represented by Edward R. Martin of Martin & Tune in Whitehouse. Martin had no comment.

A State Farm representative confirmed the settlement amount.

According to the police report, Lezcano on Sept. 2, 2016 was in a 2008 silver Ford Focus and traveling south on North Finley Avenue in Bernards Township near the intersection of West Oak Street, when a black 2013 Jeep Wrangler operated by defendant Grace Coleman struck Lezcano's vehicle on the right side. Lezcano stated Coleman pulled out into traffic and did not stop. The Jeep Grace Coleman was driving was registered to a Dennis Coleman, her father.

In the same police report, Grace Coleman, now 24, stated she stopped at the stop sign at West Oak Street and

saw that traffic looked clear, and that she was waved on by another vehicle. She admitted she did not totally look left before making her turn onto North Finley Avenue. Coleman suffered no injuries from the impact.

But Lezcano had extensive injuries. She complained of right side pain and was transported to Morristown Medical Center.

Lezcano's doctor, Dr. Joshua Rovner, opined that Lezcano sustained disc herniations at C4-5, C5-6 and C6-7, and said the injuries required an anterior cervical discectomy. Rovner said Lezcano also suffered from disc herniations at L3-4 and L4-5. She was recommended for a lumbar fusion surgery at L3-4 and L4-5 to help ease her chronic and persistent pain, according to Heck.

The defendants' medical expert, Dr. Steven H. Fried, opined that Lezcano most likely sustained soft tissue sprains, and strains to her neck and lower back. Fried further opined that there was nothing to indicate any acute traumatic injuries to Lezcano, and that her cervical surgery addressed the degenerative process seen at those levels. Fried added that he thought the degenerative process should be considered unrelated to the soft tissue injuries that he said most likely occurred at the time of the accident, according to Heck. In his deposition, Fried said he did not believe Lezcano sustained any permanent orthopedic injuries that could be directly tied to the motor vehicle accident.

Heck said the Colemans had a \$250,000



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policy and \$1 million in excess coverage with State Farm, which covered the entire settlement.

Lezcano signed the release to the insurance carrier and defense counsel for the funds on June 18, according to Heck.

The matter was originally scheduled to go to trial on May 18 in Somerset County Superior Court. Presiding Civil Judge Thomas C. Miller mediated a settlement through a series of conference calls due to COVID-19, which spanned several weeks, according to Heck.

Heck said Lezcano's life has changed because of the 2016 accident, causing ongoing pain.

"Everyday she tries her best to do the things she used to do before the accident with ease, but it's difficult for her, and the settlement reflects that," said Heck. "She's been obviously greatly affected by the accident, and absolutely, it's been a tough go for her."

— Suzette Parmley