

CRIME & JUSTICE

Philadelphia will pay \$2.9 million to settle lawsuit brought by two pedestrians struck in a high-speed police chase

A dirt bike rider struck a 6-year-old girl and her great-aunt in Upper Darby after Philadelphia Police Officer Dwayne Merrell chased him for several miles in 2017.



The 69th Street Transportation Center in Upper Darby, Pa. is photographed on Saturday, Oct. 23, 2021.

HEATHER KHALIFA / Staff Photographer

by Abraham Gutman

Published Aug. 7, 2025, 3:14 p.m. ET



Philadelphia has agreed to pay \$2.9 million to settle a lawsuit brought by a child and woman struck by a dirt bike across the city line in Upper Darby Township during what was an unauthorized high-speed police chase in 2017.

Philadelphia Police Officer Dwayne Merrell pursued a dirt-bike rider, [Caliph Douglass](#), for several miles from Southwest Philadelphia, through Cobbs Creek Park, and into Upper Darby on April 15, 2017.

Douglass struck Lillie Stubbs and her 6-year-old great-niece on a crosswalk near the 69th Street Transportation Center. The child was transported to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia with serious injuries.

The dirt-bike rider was charged with robbery of a motor vehicle, aggravated assault, and fleeing an officer, [court records show](#). Douglass entered a plea-agreement with Delaware County prosecutors in 2018, and was sentenced to five to 10 years in prison.

ADVERTISEMENT

But the lawsuit focused on the conduct of Merrell, and claims that by initiating the high-speed chase against Philadelphia Police Department policies and the directive of his supervisor, he violated the pedestrians' civil rights.

"We think of deadly uses of force by the police as firearms," said David Inscho, a Klein & Specter attorney who represents the victims. "But often times, the deadly use of force by the police is a vehicle on the roadway, and it results in a lot of deaths and serious injury."

An [Inquirer investigation published in April](#) found that roughly half of all reported chases by Philadelphia police aren't justified under department's

polices, and the number of pursuits has been increasing in recent years. The city has paid \$20 million in crash or chase-related settlements since 2020.

» **READ MORE:** [Police chases endanger kids, with little accountability.](#)

A spokesperson for the Law Department confirmed the \$2.9 million settlements and declined to comment further.

Philadelphia police directives instruct officers to initiate a pursuit only if they have witnessed a violent felony. But Merrell began the chase without even witnessing a traffic violation, according to court records.

The chase continued for eight to 10 miles and reached speeds of at least 60 miles per hour through residential neighborhoods.

Shortly before 1:30 p.m., the dirt-bike rider struck Stubbs and the 6-year-old. The impact was so strong that the two pedestrian were thrown roughly 40 feet from the crosswalk, the lawsuit says.

Douglass was thrown off his dirt bike, and stole a brown Nissan to flee the scene. Merrell passed by the crash site where, again in violation to police directives, he didn't stop to provide aid to the two unconscious pedestrians but continued his pursuit, court records said.

A police investigation into Merrell's conduct found that the officer violated the city's directives on pursuits and aiding an injured person, falsified official documents, provided false statements to a superior, and committed insubordination, [according to court records](#).

Merrell argued in court filings that he can't be sued because he enjoys qualified immunity as a police officer. In 2021, District Judge R. Barclay Surrick ruled that Merrell isn't protected and could be found liable.

On Wednesday, Klein & Specter announced the settlements in the case. Inscho said that the sides reached the agreements in mediation sessions following a February ruling that paved the way for the case to proceed to trial.

As part of the agreements, Stubbs will receive about \$400,000, Inscho said.

The injured child was awarded \$2.5 million, according to court records. Of that sum, \$1.4 million will go to the child, nearly \$200,000 to cover past medical costs, and \$833,333 to Kline & Specter.

ADVERTISEMENT

GET IN TOUCH

NEWS

[About The Inquirer](#)
[Advertise](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Subscriber Services](#)
[Newsroom Staff](#)
[Confidential Tips](#)
[Licensing & Permissions](#)
[Reprints](#)
[Careers](#)
[Delivery Jobs](#)
[Gift Subscriptions](#)
[Inquirer Store](#)
[Legal Notices](#)
[Death Notices](#)

[Today's Paper](#)
[News](#)
[Sports](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Business](#)
[Health & Science](#)
[Food](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Philly First](#)
[Inquirer LIVE](#)
[Archives](#)

GIVING

[Donate to The Inquirer](#)
[Other Ways to Contribute](#)
[About The Lenfest Institute](#)



© 2025 The Philadelphia Inquirer, LLC

[Terms of Use](#) / [Privacy Policy](#) / [Cancellation Policy](#) / [California Notice](#)
[California residents do not sell my data request](#)