



2026-GS-47-1007

NOTE: All characters, names, events, places, and circumstances in this Mock Trial case are fictitious.

**A PROJECT OF THE
SOUTH CAROLINA BAR
LAW RELATED EDUCATION (LRE) COMMITTEE
AND THE MOCK TRIAL SUBCOMMITTEE**

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With funding provided by:



HIGH SCHOOL MOCK TRIAL PAST STATE CHAMPIONS

Year	Team	Nat'l Finish	Year	Team	Nat'l Finish
1982	Dreher High School		2005	Berkeley High School	20 th
1983	Conway High School		2006	Berkeley High School	7 th
1984	Strom Thurmond High School		2007	Fort Mill High School	24 th
1985	Strom Thurmond High School		2008	Berkeley High School	32 nd
1986	Myrtle Beach High School		2009	Fort Mill High School	33 rd
1987	Strom Thurmond High School		2010	Bob Jones Academy	33 rd
1988	Socastee High School	1 st	2011	North Myrtle Beach High School	22 nd
1989	Berkeley High School		2012	Strom Thurmond High School	34 th
1990	Irmo High School		2013	North Myrtle Beach High School	13 th
1991	Berkeley High School		2014	North Myrtle Beach High School	2 nd
1992	Irmo High School		2015	Strom Thurmond High School	21 st
1993	Berkeley High School		2016	Fort Mill High School	23 rd
1994	Middleton High School		2017	Strom Thurmond High School	26 th
1995	Bob Jones Academy		2018	Heathwood Hall Episcopal	38 th
1996	Socastee High School		2019	Strom Thurmond High School	5 th
1997	Socastee High School		2020	Strom Thurmond High School	Covid
1998	Socastee High School		2021	Bob Jones Academy	5 th
1999	Socastee High School		2022	Strom Thurmond High School	26 th
2000	Berkeley High School	10 th	2023	Bob Jones Academy	12 th
2001	Bob Jones Academy	21 st	2024	Strom Thurmond High School	6 th
2002	Berkeley High School	26 th	2025	Strom Thurmond High School	35 th
2003	Bob Jones Academy	9 th	2026	Strom Thurmond High School	14 th
2004	Bob Jones Academy	1 st			



**2026 State High School Mock Trial Champions
Strom Thurmond High School**

PROFESSIONALISM AND CIVILITY AWARD WINNERS HIGH SCHOOL

The first Professionalism and Civility Awards were presented to one Middle School and High School team at their state competition. The competing teams nominated a team that demonstrated the following qualities inside and outside the courtroom:

- Professional demeanor
- Civility
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Fair play
- Respect for the competition
- Respect for fellow competitors
- Respect for volunteers and all associated with the program inside and outside the courtroom throughout the competition
- Respect for courthouse staff and facilities



HIGH SCHOOL

2017 – Chapin (State)
 2018 – Dorman (Regional)
 2018 – Gov. Sch. Science & Math (Regional)
 2018 – Indian Land (Regional)
 2018 – Kingstree (Regional)
 2018 – Spring Hill..... (Regional)
 2018 – Wilson (State)
 2019 – Fort Mill (Regional)
 2019 – Indian Land (Regional)
 2019 – Kingstree (Regional)
 2019 – Socastee..... (Regional)
 2019 – Spring Hill..... (Regional)
 2019 – Ft. Dorchester (State)
 2020 – Dutch Fork..... (Regional)
 2020 – Heathwood Hall Episcopal... (Regional)
 2020 – Kingstree (Regional)
 2021 – W.J. Keenan (Regional)
 2021 – Lexington (Regional)
 2021 – Ft. Dorchester (Regional)
 2021 – Chas. Cty. Sch. of Arts (State)
 2022 – Chas. Cty. Sch. of Arts (Regional)
 2022 – Greenwood (Regional)
 2022 – Strom Thurmond..... (Regional)

2022 – Gov School for Science & Mathematics ... (State)
 2023 – Richland Northeast (Regional)
 2023 – Strom Thurmond (Regional)
 2023 – Spring Hill (State)
 2024 – Berkeley (Regional)
 2024 – GREEN Upstate (Regional)
 2024 – Richland Northeast (Regional)
 2024 – Strom Thurmond (Regional)
 2024 – Eastside High (State)
 2025 – Berkeley (Regional)
 2025 – GREEN Upstate (Regional)
 2025 – Richland Northeast (Regional)
 2025 – Strom Thurmond (Regional)
 2025 – Eastside High (Regional)
 2025 – Hammond School (State)
 2026 – Ft. Dorchester High (Regional)
 2026 – Hammond School (Regional)
 2026 – Porter-Gaud..... (Regional)
 2026 – Hillcrest High (Regional)
 2026 – Dutch Fork High..... (Regional)
 2026 – Gov School for Science & Mathematics ... (State)

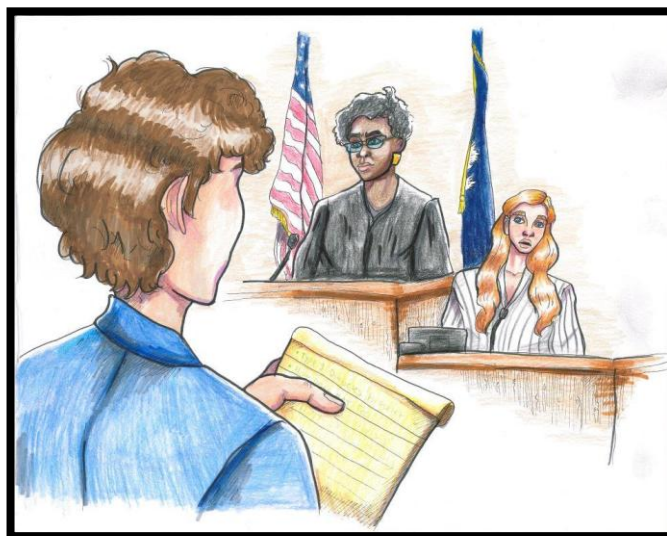
**HIGH SCHOOL MOCK TRIAL
COURTROOM ARTIST AND JOURNALIST STATE WINNERS**

COURTROOM ARTIST

2011 – Jane Xu, Dreher High
2012 – Megan Greer, Montessori School of Anderson
2013 – Elissa Na, Bob Jones Academy
2014 – Ezekiel King, Wade Hampton High
2015 – Ezekiel King, Wade Hampton High
2016 – Natalie Fanello, Montessori School of Anderson
2017 – Marina Ataalla, Carolina Forest High
2018 – Ruby Dozier, Manning High
2019 – Grace Wood, NEXT High
2020 – Morela Taffe, Indian Land High
2021 – (No competition due to virtual)
2022 – (No competition due to virtual)
2023 – Mariagustina “Nina” Rodriguez, Indian Land HS
2024 – No competition
2025 – Stephanie Watts, Carolina Forest HS
2026 – William Oldal, Charleston Co. Sch. of Arts

COURTROOM JOURNALIST

2011 – Caylyn Bird, Spring Valley High
2012 – Kayla Fenstermaker, Bob Jones Academy
2013 – Ya Fang, Gov School for Science and Mathematics
2014 – Ana Kate Barker, Bob Jones Academy
2015 – Jacqueline Tobin, Gov School for Science and Mathematics
2016 – Kristal L. Herrin, Strom Thurmond High
2017 – Rachel Black, York Preparatory Academy
2018 – Maggie May, Dorman High
2019 – Rachel Black, York Preparatory Academy
2020 – Ariel Burrow, Dorman High
2021 – (No competition due to virtual)
2022 – (No competition due to virtual)
2023 – Jacob Mijalli, Scholar’s Academy
2024 – No competition
2025 – Terrell Lee, W.J. Keenan HS
2026 – Adelaide Zelmer, Strom Thurmond HS



Sample Entry by Morella Taffe (Indian Land High School)

INTRODUCTION TO THE MOCK TRIAL COMPETITION

Mock Trial is sponsored by South Carolina Bar Law Related Education (LRE). South Carolina public, private, and charter schools, as well as homeschooled students throughout the state are invited to participate in this competitive program at the high school level. Each participating school enters a team ideally composed of 16 or more students (and a minimum of five students) and requires a teacher-coach sponsor. SC Bar LRE assists in locating attorney coaches to help teams prepare for the competition and provides teams with the case materials, the competition handbook, coaches manual, and other competition materials on the SC Bar website at www.sctbar.org/lre.

The Mock Trial season consists of regional competitions with a culminating state competition at the high school level. Teams are officially assigned to a region after the drop date assigned. *(Regions are subject to be split based on courthouse capacity, and the number of teams in a region.)*

High School Mock Trial Competition Schedule

- Regionals Saturday, February 27, 2027
- State..... Friday and Saturday, March 12, 13, 2027
- Nationals May 13-15, 2027 (St. Louis, Mo.)

GOALS

The goals of this program are first and foremost to educate South Carolina students about the basis of our American judicial system and the mechanics of litigation. The program also serves to build bridges of cooperation, respect and support between the community and the legal profession. Through participation in the Mock Trial program, students increase important skills of listening, speaking, writing, reading and analyzing. All participants are encouraged to keep in mind the goal of Mock Trial is to learn and understand the meaning of good citizenship through participation in our system of law and justice.

Students

Your participation in Mock Trial will allow you to experience what it is like to prepare for and present a case before a presiding judge and scoring judges. As you prepare, you will sharpen public speaking and presentation skills. The greatest benefit is the opportunity to learn how the legal system works. Your interaction with some of South Carolina's finest attorneys and judges in a professional setting will give you insight to the different interpretations of trial procedure and litigation styles used in the legal arena.

Teacher Coaches, Attorney Coaches, and/or Judges

Your contribution of time and talent opens up opportunities to South Carolina students. Your participation is a key element to the success of this program. All coaches should obtain and follow their school's policy on adult/student interaction.

CASE AND COMPETITION QUESTIONS

The previous Mock Trial Discussion Forum has been replaced with a Jotform for case question submissions. [Click here](#) for the Case and Competition Questions form. A page on the High School Mock Trial section of the SC Bar website will be updated each time questions are answered. This simplifies the process for questions and no longer requires login credentials.

HAVE MOCK TRIAL QUESTIONS?

Attorney Coach Needed	Donald N. Lanier
Case Questions.....	Ask via Jotform
Competition.....	Ask via Jotform or Contact Donald N. Lanier
Concerns.....	Donald N. Lanier
Credit Card Payment Portal.....	Online form
Downloading Materials	Donald N. Lanier
Forms.....	Marian Kirk
General Questions.....	Donald N. Lanier
Invoices.....	Marian Kirk
Registration	Marian Kirk
Mock Trial Training Registration	Marian Kirk

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Generative AI Disclaimer: In accordance with SC Bar policy, this disclaimer serves as notice that generative AI was used in the creation of the above exhibits.

CASE INTRODUCTION

On the night of August 14, 2026, a high-speed collision occurred on the "River Road Straightaway," a notorious stretch for illegal street racing. A modified sports car driven by Tristan Vance was seen weaving through traffic alongside a second, unidentified silver vehicle. The sports car clipped a minivan causing it to roll, resulting in the death of the driver, local teacher Morgan Ellis. Tristan Vance was found a mile and a half away with a blown tire, claiming they were never racing but were fleeing an aggressive "road rage" incident involving the silver car.

**The introduction is background material for informational purposes only.
It is not to be considered part of the case materials.**

PLEADINGS

WITNESSES

SCHP Corporal Chris Mendez

ARREST WARRANT NUMBER

DIRECT INDICTMENT

ACTION OF GRAND JURY

TRUE BILL

Brynn Forsyth

Foreperson of Grand Jury

Date: October 20, 2026

VERDICT

Foreperson of Petit Jury

Date:

DOCKET NO. 2026-GS-47-1007

The State of South Carolina

County of Taylor

COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

vs.

TRISTAN VANCE

INDICTMENT FOR

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910

Reckless Vehicular Homicide

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
)
COUNTY OF TAYLOR)

INDICTMENT

At a Court of General Sessions, convened on October 20, 2026, the Grand Jurors of Taylor County present upon their oath:

Reckless Vehicular Homicide

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910

That Tristan Vance did, in Taylor County, on or about August 14, 2026, commit the crime of Reckless Vehicular Homicide in that the Defendant, Tristan Vance, did cause the death of Morgan Ellis by the driving of a vehicle in reckless disregard of the safety of others, contrary to the laws of the State of South Carolina.

David W. Miller

DAVID W. MILLER, SOLICITOR

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA	)	SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
	)	
COUNTY OF TAYLOR	)	COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS
	)	
STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,	)	2026-GS-47-1007
	)	
Prosecution,	)	
vs.	)	
	)	
TRISTAN VANCE,	)	
	)	
Defendant.	)	PRE-TRIAL ORDER
	)	

Pre-Trial Order

On this the 31st day of August 2026, the above-captioned matter came before the undersigned judge for pretrial conference. The parties, appearing through their counsel, indicated their agreement to and approval of the terms of this Order and requested that it be made the Order of this Court. Accordingly, the terms of this Order shall not be altered, except upon a showing of good cause.

I. Statement of Case

The State of South Carolina charged the Defendant, Tristan Vance, with one count of Reckless Vehicular Homicide in violation of S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910, alleging that on August 14, 2026, the Defendant unlawfully caused the death of 34-year-old Morgan Ellis. The State alleges the death occurred when Defendant's reckless driving of a motor vehicle caused a collision. Such being contrary to the laws of the State of South Carolina, and the good order, peace and dignity thereof. Upon arraignment, Tristan Vance pled not guilty to the charge of Reckless Vehicular Homicide.

II. Pretrial Rulings

Because the parties have stipulated to the cause of the victim's death, the judge sustained the Defendant's objection to showing photos of the victim's body and injuries on the grounds that those photos would be unnecessarily cumulative of Highway Patrol Officer Chris Mendez's testimony and that, as a result, those photos would be substantially more prejudicial than probative.

The Stipulations of the parties have been received and are incorporated into this pre-trial order.

III. Jury Trial

The Defendant has not waived the right to a jury trial and, therefore, this matter will be tried before a jury of 12 drawn from the County of Taylor, Seventeenth Judicial Circuit.

IV. Applicable Law

The applicable South Carolina Criminal Statutes include the following:

SECTION 16-19-130. Betting, pool selling, bookmaking and the like prohibited.

Any person within this State who:

- (1) Engages in betting at any race track, pool selling or bookmaking, with or without writing, at any time or place; or
- (3) Records or registers bets or wagers or sells pools or makes books, with or without writing, upon the result of any (a) trial or contest of skill, speed or power of endurance of man or beast, (b) political nomination, appointment or election or (c) lot, chance, casualty, unknown or contingent event whatsoever; or
- (6) Aids, assists or abets in any manner in any of the aforesaid acts, which are hereby forbidden;

Shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be punished by a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars or imprisonment not exceeding six months, or both fine and imprisonment, in the discretion of the court.

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-1590. Unlawful to race or assist in racing on public roads

It shall be unlawful to engage in a motor vehicle race or contest for speed on any public road, street or highway in this State or to aid, abet or assist in any manner whatsoever in any such race or contest.

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-1620. Penalties for racing

Any person violating the provisions of Sections 56-5-1590 to 56-5-1620 by driving a motor vehicle shall, upon conviction, be fined not less than two hundred dollars nor more than six hundred dollars or imprisoned for not less than two months nor more than six months, or both, in the discretion of the trial judge.

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910. Reckless Vehicular Homicide

(A) When the death of a person ensues within three years as a proximate result of injury received by the driving of a vehicle in reckless disregard of the safety of others, the person operating the vehicle is guilty of reckless vehicular homicide. A person who is convicted of, pleads guilty to, or pleads nolo contendere to reckless vehicular homicide is guilty of a felony, and must be fined not less than one thousand dollars nor more than five thousand dollars or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both. The Department of Motor Vehicles shall revoke for five years the driver's license of a person convicted of reckless vehicular homicide.

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910. Reckless Vehicular Driving; penalties

Any person who drives any vehicle in such a manner as to indicate either a willful or wanton disregard for the safety of persons or property is guilty of reckless driving. Any person violating the provisions of this section shall, upon conviction, entry of a plea of guilty or forfeiture of bail, be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five dollars nor more than two hundred dollars or by imprisonment for not more than thirty days.

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-3910. Roadway Protection and Safety Act

(A) As contained in this section:

(1) "Street takeover" means the unauthorized deliberate and coordinated obstruction of a public roadway, street, highway, intersection, public vehicular area, private property without owner consent, or parking lot for illegal vehicle exhibitions including, but not limited to, burnouts, drifting, doughnuts, speed contests, stunts, wheelies, or other driving maneuvers that show a willful and wanton disregard for the safety of persons or property.

(2) "Participant" means an individual operating a vehicle, riding as a passenger, or engaging in activities with the intent to contribute to a street takeover.

(9) "Speed contest" means the operation of one or more motor vehicle(s) in a competitive attempt to outgain another motor vehicle or improve one's speed or time, including racing, timed acceleration, or attempts to outperform another motor vehicle.

(B) A participant in a street takeover:

(1) for a first offense is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than five hundred dollars, imprisoned not more than one year, or both; or

(2) for a second or subsequent offense is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than three thousand dollars, imprisoned not more than three years, or both.

(E) A person convicted of a crime contained in subsection (B) who, during the commission of the crime, also:

- (1) fled a law enforcement officer during a street takeover is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than five hundred dollars, imprisoned not more than one year, in addition to the punishment provided for with the principal crime;
- (2) endangered pedestrians, law enforcement officers, or other drivers is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined up to an additional three thousand dollars and imprisoned not more than one year, in addition to the punishment provided for with the principal crime;
- (3) inflicted bodily injury upon another person is guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, must be fined an additional ten thousand dollars and imprisoned not more than five years, in addition to the punishment provided for with the principal crime; or
- (4) caused the death of another person is guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, must be fined an additional twenty-five thousand dollars, and imprisoned not more than ten years, in addition to the punishment provided for with the principal crime.

(H) Any vehicle with illegal street racing modifications is not legal to operate on a public roadway, street, highway, intersection, public vehicular area, or parking lot. Such a vehicle shall immediately be forfeited to law enforcement upon a conviction for use of that vehicle in a street takeover.

S.C. Code Ann. § 56-10-1520 General rules as to maximum speed limits; lower speeds may be required.

(A) A person shall not drive a vehicle on a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions and having regard to the actual and potential hazards then existing. Speed must be so controlled to avoid colliding with a person, vehicle, or other conveyance on or entering the highway in compliance with legal requirements and the duty of a person to use care.

(F) The driver of a vehicle shall drive, consistent with the requirements of subsection (A), at an appropriate reduced speed when approaching and crossing an intersection or railway grade crossing, when approaching and going around a curve, approaching a hillcrest, when traveling upon any narrow bridge, narrow or winding roadway, and when special hazard exists with respect to pedestrians or other traffic or by reason of weather or highway conditions.

(G) A person violating the speed limits established by this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction for a first offense, must be fined or imprisoned as follows:

- (1) in excess of the above posted limit but not in excess of ten miles an hour by a fine of not less than fifteen dollars nor more than twenty-five dollars;
 - (2) in excess of ten miles an hour but less than fifteen miles an hour above the posted limit by a fine of not less than twenty-five dollars nor more than fifty dollars;
 - (3) in excess of fifteen miles an hour but less than twenty-five miles an hour above the posted limit by a fine of not less than fifty dollars nor more than seventy-five dollars;
- and

(4) in excess of twenty-five miles an hour above the posted limit by a fine of not less than seventy-five dollars nor more than two hundred dollars or imprisoned for not more than thirty days.

IT IS SO ORDERED, this day of this round of the Mock Trial Competition.

/s/ Presiding Judge

The Honorable Presiding Judge

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA	)	SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
	)	
COUNTY OF TAYLOR	)	COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS
	)	
STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,	)	2026-GS-47-1007
	)	
Prosecution,	)	
vs.	)	
	)	STIPULATIONS
TRISTAN VANCE,	)	
	)	
Defendant.	)	
	)	

The parties agree and stipulate to the following:

1. The signatures on the witness statements are authentic and signed under oath by each witness.
2. The jury charges are accurate in all respects. No objections to jury charges may be raised.
3. The indictment is valid. The Defendant may not challenge the indictment as deficient.
4. All exhibits listed are authentic and accurate in all respects, and no objections to the authenticity of the exhibits shall be entertained.
5. All searches of property and persons were done with lawful authority and within the bounds of the Fourth Amendment. The constitutional validity of any search of any property or person may not be challenged or called into question during the trial of this case. The chain of custody of evidence collected during the investigation is not in dispute.
6. The Defendant, Tristan Vance, was properly advised of *Miranda* warnings. The voluntariness of any interview based on *Miranda* may not be challenged or called into question during the trial of the case.
7. The Coroner is unavailable to testify, and has no further information to offer.
8. Both parties stipulate to the cause of death of Morgan Ellis as being craniocerebral and cervical spinal trauma resulting from blunt force injuries.

9. No person at the River Road Straightaway other than named witnesses had any substantive information to offer related to the case. No other witnesses may be called or inferred.
10. No video footage or pictures exist outside of what are provided in the exhibits and no witness is available to testify about what may have been on the unrecovered video recordings.
11. The separate trial of Jody James is tentatively scheduled to commence in April of 2027 and there are no additional details regarding any plea offers or negotiations.

IT IS SO ORDERED, this day of this round of the Mock Trial Competition.

/s/ Presiding Judge
The Honorable Presiding Judge

2026-27 High School Mock Trial Glossary of Terms

Aorta	The great arterial trunk that carries blood from the heart to be distributed by branch arteries through the body.
Basilar	Of, relating to, or situated at the base.
Cervical	Of or relating to a neck
Chromatograph	An instrument for performing chromatographic separations and producing chromatograms.
Craniocerebral	Involving both cranium and brain.
Hemothorax	Blood in the pleural cavity.
Pleura	The delicate serous membrane that lines each half of the thorax of mammals and is folded back over the surface of the lung of the same side.
Pleural cavity	The space that is formed when the two layers of the pleura spread apart.
Pneumatic	Of, relating to, or using gas (such as air or wind).
Yaw	The action of yawing; especially a side-to-side movement

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA	)	SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
	)	
COUNTY OF TAYLOR	)	COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS
	)	
STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,	)	2026-GS-47-1007
	)	
Prosecution,	)	
vs.	)	
	)	JURY INSTRUCTIONS
TRISTAN VANCE,	)	
	)	
Defendant.	)	
	)	

Note:

Jury instructions are NOT to be read to the jury on the day of the Mock Trial Competition.

The Court hereby approves the following jury instructions in the above captioned case. It notes the presentation of evidence at trial may warrant additional instruction, and it will consider those instructions at a later date.

A. The Jury: Finders of the Facts

Under our Constitution and Code of Laws, only you – the jury – can make the findings of fact in this case. I am not permitted to tell you how I feel about the evidence which has been presented. Throughout this trial, I have intended to be fair and impartial toward each of the parties involved.

To determine the facts in this case, you will have to evaluate the credibility – or believability of witnesses. You are the sole judges of the credibility of the witnesses. In determining their credibility, you may take into consideration many things, such as:

- (1) How would you describe the appearance and manner of the witness on the stand, sometimes referred to as the demeanor of the witness?
- (2) Was the witness forthright or hesitant?
- (3) Was the witness's testimony consistent or did it contain discrepancies?
- (4) What was the ability of the witness to know the facts about which he or she testified?
- (5) Did the witness have a cause or a reason to be biased and prejudiced in favor of the testimony he or she gave?

- (6) Was the testimony of the witness corroborated or made stronger by other testimony and evidence or was it made weaker or impeached by such other testimony and evidence?

You can believe as much or as little of each witness's testimony as you think proper. You may believe the testimony of a single witness against that of many witnesses – or just the opposite.

Of course, you do not determine the truth merely by counting the number of witnesses presented by each side. Throughout this process you have but one objective – to decide whether the State presented evidence of the defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt

B. Circumstantial Evidence

There are two types of evidence generally presented during a trial – direct evidence and circumstantial evidence. Direct evidence is the testimony of a person who asserts or claims to have actual knowledge of a fact, such as an eyewitness. Circumstantial evidence is proof of a chain of facts and circumstances indicating the existence of a fact in issue. The law makes absolutely no distinction between the weight or value to be given to either direct or circumstantial evidence. Nor is a greater degree of certainty required of circumstantial evidence than of direct evidence.

You should weigh all the evidence in the case in arriving at a verdict.

C. The Judge: Instructor of the Law

The same Constitution and laws that designate and make you the finders of the facts also make me the instructor of the law. You must accept the law as I give it to you. If I am wrong, there is another place and time for that error to be corrected. But for now, you must accept the law as I give it to you – and I caution you that it does not mean what you think the law should be, but what I tell you it is.

D. Instruction:

You have been selected and sworn as the jury to try this case of the State of South Carolina against the Defendant, Tristan Vance. The Defendant is charged with Reckless Vehicular Homicide in violation of S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910. The Indictment in this case is the formal method of accusing the Defendant of the crime. The Indictment is not evidence and you should not allow yourselves to be influenced against the Defendant by reason of the filing of the Indictment. The Defendant has pled not guilty to the charge. A plea of not guilty puts at issue each element of the crime with which the Defendant is charged. A plea of not guilty requires the State to prove each element of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. The Defendant is presumed innocent of the crime and this presumption continues unless and until, after consideration of all the evidence, you are convinced of the Defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The Defendant must be

found not guilty unless the State produces evidence that convinces you beyond a reasonable doubt of the existence of each element of the crime. It is your responsibility as jurors to determine the facts from the evidence, to follow the law as stated in the instructions from the presiding judge, and to reach a verdict of not guilty or guilty based upon the evidence.

We will now have opening statements of the counsel. Statements and arguments of counsel are not evidence. The purpose of opening statements and closing arguments is to assist you, the jury, in making a decision in this case; however, that decision must be based upon the evidence in this case, which consists of the testimony delivered under oath in this trial, any documents or other items introduced into evidence during this trial, and the stipulations of the parties.

Closing Instructions:

A. Introduction:

Now that all the evidence has been presented, it is my duty under the law to give you the instructions that apply in this case. The instructions contain all rules of the law that are to be applied by you and all the rules by which you are to weigh the evidence and determine the facts at issue in deciding this case and reaching a verdict. You must consider the instructions as a whole. All the testimony and evidence that is proper for you to consider has been introduced in this case. You should not consider any matter of fact or of law except that which has been given to you during the trial of this case.

It is your responsibility as jurors to determine the facts from the evidence, to follow the rules of law as stated in these instructions, and to reach a fair and impartial verdict of guilty or not guilty based upon the evidence, as you have sworn you would do. You must not use any method of chance in arriving at a verdict but must base your verdict on the judgment of each juror.

B. Elements of the Charge:

In this matter, the Defendant has been charged with:

(a) Reckless Vehicular Homicide, under S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910

To this charge, the Defendant has entered a plea of not guilty. I will now define the elements of the charge.

Reckless Vehicular Homicide – S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910:

The Defendant is charged with Reckless Vehicular Homicide. The State must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the Defendant killed another person by the driving of a vehicle in reckless disregard to the safety of others.

If, after considering all of the evidence, you conclude that the State has proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the Defendant committed the crime of Reckless Vehicular

Homicide in violation of S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910, you must return a verdict of guilty as to this charge on the jury verdict form. If, on the other hand, you conclude that the State has failed to meet its burden of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that the Defendant committed the crime of Reckless Vehicular Homicide in violation of S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910, you must return a verdict of not guilty as to this charge on the jury verdict form.

C. Presumption of Innocence and Reasonable Doubt:

The Defendant is presumed innocent. That presumption continues unless, after consideration of all the evidence, you are convinced of the Defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The State has the burden of presenting the evidence that establishes the Defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The Defendant must be found not guilty unless the State produces evidence that convinces you, beyond a reasonable doubt, of each and every element of the crime alleged.

"Beyond a reasonable doubt" is defined as "proof of such a convincing character that you would be willing to rely and act upon it without hesitation in the most important of your own affairs."

D. Evidence – Definition:

Evidence is the testimony received from the witnesses under oath, stipulations made by the parties, and the exhibits admitted into evidence during the trial.

E. Evidence – Inferences:

You should consider only the evidence introduced while the court is in session. You are permitted to draw such reasonable inferences from the testimony and exhibits as you feel are justified when considered with the aid of the knowledge that you each possess in common with other persons. You may make deductions and reach conclusions that reason, and common sense lead you to draw from the facts that you find to have been established by the evidence in this case.

F. Indictments Not Evidence:

Again, the Indictment in this case is the formal method of accusing the Defendant of a crime. The Indictment is not evidence of guilt. You should not allow yourselves to be influenced against the Defendant by reason of the filing of the Indictment.

G. Judicial Rulings:

The Court has made rulings in the conduct of the trial and the admission of evidence. These rulings should have no bearing on the weight or credit to be given any evidence or testimony admitted during the trial, nor should they be considered by you in any manner to indicate the conclusions to be reached by you in this case.

H. Objections:

From time to time during this trial, the attorneys have made objections that I have ruled on. You should not speculate upon the reasons why objections were made. If I approved

or sustained an objection, you should not speculate on what might have been said or what might have occurred had the objection not been sustained by me.

I. Credibility of Witnesses:

It is your responsibility to determine the credibility of each witness and the weight to be given the testimony of each witness. In determining such weight or credibility, you may properly consider: the interest, if any, that the witness may have in the result of the trial; the relation of the witness to the parties; the bias or prejudice of the witness, if any has been apparent; the candor, fairness, intelligence, and demeanor of the witness; the ability of the witness to remember and relate past occurrences; and, the means of observation and the opportunity of knowing the matters about which the witness has testified. From all the facts and circumstances appearing in evidence and coming to your observation during the trial, aided by the knowledge that you each possess in common with other persons, you will reach your conclusions. You should not let sympathy, sentiment, or prejudice enter into your deliberations, but should discharge your duties as jurors impartially, conscientiously, and faithfully under your oaths and return a verdict as the evidence warrants when measured by these instructions.

J. Punishment:

You are only concerned with the guilt or innocence of the Defendant. You are not to concern yourselves with punishment.

K. Verdict Instructions:

After you have retired to consider your verdict, a member of the jury is selected as your foreperson and then you begin your deliberations. The foreperson is to maintain orderly deliberations but should have no greater influence on the deliberations than any other member of the jury. Your verdict must be unanimous. When you have agreed on a verdict, your foreperson will sign the verdict form and you will, as a body, return the verdict form in open court.

L. Verdict Form:

The verdict form approved by the Court is attached hereto.

IT IS SO ORDERED, this day of this round of the Mock Trial competition.

/s/ Presiding Judge
The Honorable Presiding Judge

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA	)	SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
	)	
COUNTY OF TAYLOR	)	COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS
	)	
STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,	)	2026-GS-47-1007
	)	
Prosecution,	)	
vs.	)	
	)	JURY VERDICT FORM
TRISTAN VANCE,	)	
	)	
Defendant.	)	
	)	

JURY VERDICT FORM

We, the jury, empaneled and sworn in the above-entitled cause, do, upon our oaths, find as follows:

As to **COUNT 1 – Reckless Vehicular Homicide** (S.C. Code Ann. § 56-5-2910)

Defendant is:

_____	Guilty
_____	Not Guilty

Foreperson

WITNESS LISTING

PROSECUTION	
Chris Mendez	SC Highway Patrol
Jody James	Underground Event Organizer
Dr. Avery Lane	Medical Examiner

DEFENSE	
Tristan Vance	Defendant
Casey Miller	Professional Engineer
Eli Quinn	Friend and Passenger

Affidavit of
Chris Mendez

(SC Highway Patrol)

-
- 1 1. My name is Chris Mendez, and I am a Corporal with the South Carolina Highway Patrol
2 (SCHP). I have been a State Trooper for fifteen years, serving the last twelve years in the
3 Multi-disciplinary Accident Investigation Team.
 - 4 2. I am 37 years old, and I was born and raised in the working-class neighborhood of East
5 River, South Carolina. Growing up in proximity to the industrial areas of the city sparked
6 my early fascination with mechanical engineering and physics. I earned my Bachelor of
7 Science in Mechanical Engineering from the University of South Carolina in 2009. Rather
8 than pursuing a traditional corporate engineering path, I chose to apply my technical
9 background to public safety. I graduated from the South Carolina Criminal Justice
10 Academy in 2010 at the top of my Basic Law Enforcement (BLE) class. Following the BLE
11 graduation, I completed the SCHP courses commonly called Trooper School to become
12 fully certified as a State Trooper.
 - 13 3. My advanced professional credentials and certifications include: Full Accreditation as a
14 Traffic Accident Reconstructionist, Advanced Crash Reconstruction Certification, and
15 Expert Certification in Event Data Recorder (EDR) and Electronic Control Unit (ECM)
16 Inspection and Data Extraction. I have also taken numerous advanced classes at The
17 Academy over the years. My most relevant training to this case included At Scene Collision
18 Investigation, Technical Collision Investigation, and Collision Reconstruction.
 - 19 4. Over the course of my fifteen-year career, I have personally investigated and analyzed
20 more than 1,800 motor vehicle collisions, or an average of about 120 per year. Over
21 seventy-five of these investigations involved high-speed impacts exceeding 90 miles per
22 hour, and more than fifty involved vehicular homicides or fatalities. One of my pet peeves
23 is when people refer to these collisions as “accidents.” Every vehicle collision is traceable
24 back to a specific cause, normally a human error during driving. To call such collisions
25 “accidents” is just a misrepresentation about what happened.
 - 26 5. On August 14, 2026, at approximately 11:08 PM, I was dispatched to the scene of a fatal
27 multi-vehicle collision located in Taylor County on SC State Route 4, also referred to

locally as the "River Road Straightaway." It is a notorious, flat, four-lane stretch of asphalt widely known to local law enforcement as a staging ground for illegal racing. Street racing has gotten much more frequent since those Fast & Furious movies started coming out, making it seem glamorous. Street racing is actually very dangerous and can lead to tragedies like what we have now.

6. Per the 911 Dispatch records marked as [Exhibit #1](#), Fire and EMS rescue personnel arrived on scene at 11:13 PM and began standard vehicle rescue procedures. Rescue personnel were forced to cut the driver free of the vehicle using a hydraulic extraction tool, known also as the Jaws of Life. The vehicle remained on its right side and had extensive damage to the vehicle roof which would not allow extraction from the top through the driver's side. The driver was determined to be belted into the driver's seat. The coroner pronounced the driver dead upon removal from the vehicle. The driver's license found inside a purse in the vehicle indicated the driver to be Morgan Ellis. Identification of the deceased was confirmed by family the following day.

7. I arrived on scene at 11:24 PM. I observed a silver 2018 Honda Odyssey minivan overturned on its passenger side in the median and lanes of travel. The at-scene photo of the van has been marked as [Exhibit #3](#). The minivan exhibited extensive catastrophic crush damage along both sides and the roofline, indicative of a high-energy, rollover event. Based on the people on the scene when I arrived, airbag deployment and seatbelt placement in the minivan, I determined that the driver was the sole occupant of the minivan at the time of the collision. My report on the collision has been marked as [Exhibit #2](#).

8. The Supplemental Restraint System, also known as airbags, showed deployment of all airbags, to include front, and two stage side curtain airbags on both sides. This indicates a side impact rollover event only with no impact to the front of the vehicle.

9. The roadway was littered with a dense debris field indicative of a severe collision. Metal and fiberglass fragments, shattered safety glass, and fluid trails were scattered across the road. The debris field extended from the final resting position of the vehicle backwards to a total distance of approximately 240 feet, establishing a violent and prolonged event.

57 10. While on scene, SCHP dispatch notified me of a damaged vehicle report located on SC
58 State Route 4 approximately one and a half miles from the accident scene. The report
59 stated that the vehicle had been involved in a collision. I responded to the reported
60 location and found a dark metallic 2021 Ford Mustang. The Mustang had a damaged tire,
61 minor damage to the rear driver-side quarter-panel, and damage to the front passenger-
62 side fender. The condition of the vehicle was indicative of aggressive driving and a recent
63 collision with at least one other vehicle. Given the minivan collision just a mile and a half
64 away, I was immediately suspicious that the Mustang was involved in the collision I just
65 left.

66 11. The driver of the Mustang, identified by driver's license as Tristan Vance, claimed to have
67 been fleeing an aggressive silver BMW. Vance stated there was possibly a minor collision
68 between the two vehicles while they were trying to flee. In addition to Vance, a passenger,
69 Eli Quinn, was in Vance's vehicle during the events leading up to the collision with the
70 victim's minivan. According to Vance, the incident began at a Shell gas station on
71 American Legion Road. The BMW driver challenged Vance to race and yelled threats and
72 obscenities at Vance.

73 12. After receiving this initial description of what caused the Mustang's collision from Tristan
74 Vance, I then read Tristan Vance and Eli Quinn their *Miranda* warnings prior to continuing
75 their interviews. Vance again claimed to have been fleeing a silver BMW when there was a
76 collision between Vance's vehicle and the BMW. Vance admitted to driving in excess of 100
77 miles per hour when a silver BMW, the supposed "aggressive vehicle," collided with
78 Vance's rear, driver-side of the car. Vance's vehicle was disabled from the destroyed rear
79 left tire. Vance claimed that this collision caused Vance to have a very minor side-swipe
80 collision with the minivan. Based on my investigation, I placed Vance under arrest. I
81 charged Vance with reckless vehicular homicide, reckless operation of a motor vehicle,
82 and street racing in connection with the death of Morgan Ellis. After confirmation of the
83 speed of 104 mph from the car's ECM, I also charged Vance with speeding greater than 25
84 mph above the 45 mph speed limit.

- 85 13. Following the interviews with Vance and Quinn, I checked the area leading back to the
86 primary incident location, and then to the Shell gas station where Vance claimed to have
87 had the run in with the silver BMW. I could not find any eyewitnesses or video footage. The
88 gas station referenced by Vance did have cameras, but I was able to recover only two
89 photos – one of the Mustang being fueled, and one of the Mustang being fueled with the
90 Silver BMW beside it. I could not see any individuals in the images, and because of
91 technical glitches the video did not capture either vehicle driving into or out of the Shell
92 gas station. The Shell gas station photos have been marked as [Exhibit #9](#).
- 93 14. I returned to the scene of the event the following morning to examine the roadway and
94 adjacent area in daylight. I observed several different sets of dark black tire marks on the
95 pavement, each of which extended between 25 and 100 feet. These tire marks indicate
96 one or more vehicles braking hard and swerving in the roadway lanes. This is consistent
97 with multiple vehicle contact, loss of control and the scene I examined the evening before.
- 98 15. The roadway was a level, straight multi-lane roadway of typical asphalt construction and
99 did not appear to have observable potholes, loose service material or other damaged
100 surfaces that would contribute to a loss of control. A search of the SCHP accident location
101 database did not show a history of multiple motor vehicle collisions within a mile radius
102 of the location. A diagram of the incident location has been marked as [Exhibit #10](#).
- 103 16. To reconstruct the sequence of events leading up to, during, and after the collision, I
104 utilized a comprehensive forensic methodology. I utilized the Bosch CDR tool to pull the
105 non-volatile memory from the ECM and "black box" of the defendant's vehicle.
- 106 17. The physics of collisions do not lie because they are based on math and standard, known
107 rules of physics. At a verified speed of 104 MPH, a vehicle covers approximately 152.5 feet
108 per second. At this velocity, human perception-reaction time, typically averaging 1.5
109 seconds, translates to over 220 feet of travel distance before a driver can even begin to
110 mechanically apply the brakes.
- 111 18. The digital extraction from the defendant's ECM provided a second-by-second breakdown
112 of the vehicle's telemetry prior to the collision. The data indicates that exactly 3.2 seconds
113 prior to impact, the defendant's vehicle was traveling at 104 MPH. Critically, the throttle

input was recorded at 92% to 96% open, meaning the accelerator pedal was completely pressed to the floor.

19. The ECM data reveals that brake pressure remained at absolute zero throughout the entire 5-second pre-collision window. There was no attempt by the driver to slow down to avoid the impending collision prior to striking the minivan. Also, there was no indication of any braking after the alleged hit by the BMW, which I would have expected to see if such a hit had taken place as described by Vance.

20. The ECM recorded a sudden, violent steering input of 42 degrees to the left, followed immediately by a rapid corrective right counter-steer. This is not the signature of an emergency evasive maneuver. Rather, it is mathematically and physically consistent with a "racing swerve" or "slingshot" passing maneuver, commonly executed when a racing vehicle attempts to whip out from behind a lead vehicle to overtake it. Additionally, if Vance's vehicle had been hit by the supposed BMW, there would likely be some sort of tire marks on the roadway indicating such a collision took place, even if the vehicles continued to maintain control. I was unable to locate any tire marks consistent with what Vance described the BMW doing.

21. The physical evidence on the roadway perfectly mirrors this digital data. The pavement bore pronounced, curved yaw marks rather than straight, heavy braking skid marks. This proves that the defendant's vehicle was executing a lateral, high-speed overtaking maneuver when they lost control, causing the front passenger side of the Mustang to violently clip the rear driver side quarter panel of the minivan.

22. Upon a physical inspection of the defendant's vehicle at the impound lot, I discovered two Nitrous Oxide Systems (NOS) canisters mounted in the trunk, plumbed with feed lines running toward the engine bay. A picture of the trunk with canisters mounted has been marked as [Exhibit #4](#). NOS canisters are commonly used in street racing vehicles to give them a sudden boost in speed during a race. While the defense asserts these canisters were entirely decorative and intended solely for a "car show display," their presence suggests a vehicle modified explicitly for drag racing and maximum straight-line acceleration.

143 23. I am aware that the defendant claims they were not racing, but were instead fleeing an
144 aggressive, unknown silver vehicle in a "road rage" incident. I did observe a distinct layer
145 of aftermarket silver paint transfer on the rear bumper cover and driver's side quarter
146 panel of the defendant's Mustang, which does not match the paint profile of the victim's
147 minivan. A photo of this paint transfer and damage has been marked as [Exhibit #7](#). While
148 this physical evidence strongly suggests contact with a third, unidentified vehicle, it does
149 not absolve the defendant. There is no way to tell when that paint transfer occurred. It
150 could have transferred that same day or it could have transferred months ago.

151 24. Even if a secondary vehicle was acting aggressively, the physics prove that the primary,
152 proximate cause of the minivan's collision and the victim's fatality was the defendant's
153 independent, ego-driven decision to drive at a speed of 104 MPH on a public highway. The
154 defendant chose to treat a public thoroughfare like a private racetrack.

155 25. In my professional opinion, the primary contributing factors to this fatal collision were
156 grossly excessive and illegal speed, 104 MPH in a 45 MPH zone; aggressive, intentional
157 steering inputs consistent with street-racing dynamics; and a total failure to apply brakes
158 or attempt deceleration prior to impact.

159 26. The defendant's manner of driving operated entirely outside the boundaries of anything
160 approaching reasonable. Regardless of the presence of a secondary vehicle, the
161 defendant intentionally operated a modified vehicle in a manner causing catastrophic
162 bodily harm and death. This reckless behavior directly resulted in the rollover event that
163 claimed the life of Morgan Ellis.

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Chris Mendez

Chris Mendez

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the South Carolina Mock Trial Competition.

Anthony Roberts

Anthony Roberts, Notary Public

State of South Carolina

My Commission Expires: 10/24/30

Affidavit of
Jody James

(underground event organizer)

1. My name is Jody James, but I'm known within the automotive community as "JJ." I am 25 years old, and I am a lifelong resident of East River, South Carolina. After graduating from East River Technical High School in 2019 with a concentration in automotive repair, I began working as a junior mechanic at *Precision Auto Werkz* in East River.
2. I have always been interested in fast and uniquely modified cars. For a couple of years, I had a heavily modified Mazda RX7 with the V8 from a Corvette. The Mazda was so light it would take off the start line like nothing else I have driven since. Eventually my luck ran out and I was caught street racing. The car was impounded and I had some pretty hefty fines in addition to losing my license for 6 months. To say I'm familiar with high-performance vehicles, engine modifications, and the local car culture is an understatement. Over the past five years, I have become a fixture at informal automotive gatherings across Taylor County; in particular, along SC Route 4. There are only a couple of good sections of asphalt in the county that are good enough locations for racing. The road has even lanes, not too many potholes, and cops are not patrolling. It is easy for participants and spectators to get in and out quickly. The River Road Straightaway is considered the best location because it is straight, flat, and cars can easily get up to exciting speeds.
3. While I still work on cars by day, my primary role at these late-night gatherings over the last three years has evolved into organizing informal, high-stakes bets on the outcomes of the races. Because of this role, I have extensive knowledge of the regular drivers, their cars, performance capabilities, and the etiquette and mechanics of street racing. I have to mentally calculate the odds so that I can cover the bets and make sure I still had enough money in the pot to cover my transaction fees. By organizing these races, the local racers get their fix of adrenaline while racing and I make a profit. Everybody wins.
4. I have personally seen the defendant, Tristan "Turbo" Vance, at these illegal River Road racing gatherings at least a dozen times over the past year. Vance's vehicle, a heavily modified, dark metallic 2021 Ford Mustang GT, is notorious within the street racing community. It is widely recognized as one of the fastest, most aggressively tuned cars in

the county. I know Vance has spent thousands of dollars modifying the vehicle for maximum straight-line speed. The car was fitted with aftermarket exhaust, ECM tuning, and a trunk-mounted Nitrous Oxide System (NOS). Vance is not shy about bragging about his car at the late-night gatherings. The shop I work for has installed some of the modifications I am talking about. With every modification we install, Vance must sign a waiver acknowledging that they are not for street use, and only valid for track purposes. We do that to protect against liability for someone wrecking a modded car. I know that Vance would spend money hand over fist just to be faster.

5. On the night of August 14, 2026, at approximately 10:40 PM, I arrived at the designated staging area on the SC Route 4 near mile marker 12. The weather was clear and the roads were dry. There was a substantial crowd already gathered, consisting of approximately 40 to 50 people, including drivers and spectators. There was a lot of talking and showing off cars at first. Once people realized I was in the crowd, racers started challenging others to race. Of course, I was there to take money and write down who was racing who. By 10:50, we were ready to race. By 11:05, we had already had several races run. Some for money, some just for the glory of a win. Not everyone who wants to race has cash to race.
6. At approximately 11:06 PM, I observed Vance pull into the staging area in the modified Mustang. I say staging area, but really, it's just a spot on SC Route 4 where someone spray painted a red starting line across all the lanes. The crowd immediately acknowledged Vance's arrival, given the vehicle's reputation. Right after, an unidentified silver sedan, which I had never seen before or since, pulled up alongside Vance's vehicle. It's exhaust sound and body lines showed it was a late-model, high-performance BMW.
7. I saw the driver of the silver BMW initiate what is known in the street racing community as a "call-out." The driver was shouting provocations, "talking trash" about Vance's car, and demanding a head-to-head drag race. This was not anyone I recognized as being part of the normal crowd. Instead of ignoring the provocation, turning around, or looking for help, Vance took the bait. Rather than de-escalating or leaving from an uncomfortable situation, Vance actively engaged with the driver of the BMW, nodding and signaling acceptance of the challenge. I've seen this type of exchange hundreds of times, and to me,

the intention of both drivers was clear. They were going to race. Both drivers intentionally maneuvered their vehicles side-by-side, perfectly aligning their front bumpers at the well-known starting line on the eastbound lane of SC Route 4.

8. While standing at the starting line, I saw and heard unmistakable indicators of a classic, competitive drag race start, engine revving and two-step launch control. Vance's Mustang was producing a distinct, rapid firing noise, a popping and banging sound. This indicated the engine was hitting a launch-control rev limiter designed to build power before a hard launch. Both vehicles were rocking and creeping forward inches at a time, a common behavior when drivers are attempting to anticipate the start signal to gain a split-second competitive advantage. Members of the crowd lined up along the shoulders of the road, pulling out their cell phones to record the impending race. I doubt that anyone posted anything. Since the police have figured out how to trace when and who posted videos to the major social media sites, people stopped putting them up. So, unless you know somebody and unless you know that person was at a particular race, the recordings are kept private. After a race is over, I don't really care to see it again myself. I don't record anything because I don't want a record of what I was doing.

9. I observed someone at the side of the road, just ahead of the two vehicles to act as the starter. This individual gave the standard, universal street racing signal, shouting a countdown and violently dropping their hands in a downward motion. I don't know who it was, definitely not a local. Just somebody who took it on themselves to start the race. Upon that signal, both vehicles launched simultaneously, with maximum throttle. I heard the deafening screech of burning rubber and saw heavy smoke billowing from the rear tires of Vance's Mustang as it fought for traction. Both vehicles screamed off into the darkness, side-by-side, accelerating at a speed that completely eclipsed normal driving. Based on my extensive experience observing hundreds of street races, this was absolutely a coordinated, competitive drag race. Tristan Vance was not being chased, nor were they trying to escape an aggressive driver. Vance was chasing a win.

10. Later that night I heard Morgan Ellis had gotten killed down the River Road Straightaway. I wondered if her crash had been tied to one of the street races. I have seen the diagram

marked as [Exhibit #10](#). The police showed it to me when I was interviewed about the events of August 14, 2026. I don't know who created this exhibit, but the locations and general descriptions were accurate. Of course, I didn't see the accident because it was too far down the road. The last thing I saw was the two cars' taillights speeding off. The whole crowd of spectators heard the crash! We knew after that noise that something had happened, and no one wanted to stick around. Everyone at the starting line jumped into their cars and motorcycles and left as quickly as possible to get out of there before any police showed up. I don't recall or know anyone else who was there and then scattered from the starting line. I only remember Vance because the Mustang is so well known. It's not like we take a roll call for these events. They also showed me photos at the gas station of both Vance's Mustang, and the silver BMW, which have been marked as [Exhibit #3](#). It was awful to see the results of the crash, and to know someone died.

11. I openly acknowledge that I am testifying in this matter following my arrest by the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) during their "Operation Safe Streets." As part of SLED's investigation, my street race organizing and friendly wagering activities came to light. Detectives executed a search warrant and recovered my personal betting sheet from the night of August 14, which has been marked as [Exhibit #6](#). The dates were when I took the money and wrote down the wager, not the night of the races, which was August 14th. I was charged with gambling and organizing street racing under the new Roadway Protection and Safety Act, and conspiracy attached to both. So far I have pled not guilty to these charges, and I am told I will have my trial sometime after the beginning of next year. In exchange for my truthful, complete testimony regarding the events of that evening, the State of South Carolina has offered me consideration regarding those charges. I don't want to go to jail, but I am okay with paying a fine for my illegal activities. This agreement has not influenced the substance of my testimony. The threat of legal trouble does not change the physical reality of what I witnessed. I am testifying because a local teacher lost her life, and I know exactly how the Mustang left the starting line. My description of Vance willingly lining up, revving the engine, and launching into a competitive drag race is a completely accurate account of what I personally saw.

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Jody James

Jody James

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the South Carolina Mock Trial Competition.

William Smith

William Smith, Notary Public

State of South Carolina

My Commission Expires: 12/08/27

Affidavit of
Dr. Avery Lane

(Medical Examiner)

1. My name is Dr. Avery Lane. I am a licensed physician in the State of South Carolina, board-certified in both Anatomic Pathology and Forensic Pathology by the American Board of Pathology. I currently serve as a Medical Examiner in Taylor County.
2. I am 49 years old, born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts. I attended Tufts University, where I graduated with honors with a Bachelor of Science in Biology in 1999. I earned my Doctor of Medicine at Boston University School of Medicine in 2003. Following medical school, I completed a four-year residency in Anatomic and Clinical Pathology at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, followed by a specialized, one-year fellowship in Forensic Pathology at the State of Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. I have worked in this field for more than 18 years.
3. I am board-certified in Forensic Pathology and Clinical Toxicology by the American Board of Pathology. Over my career as a medical examiner, I have personally performed or supervised over 1,800 autopsies. I have testified as an expert witness in forensic pathology and toxicology in state and federal courts on over eighty cases.
4. On August 17, 2026, at 1:30 PM, I performed a comprehensive post-mortem examination (Autopsy Case No. 2026-A-0990) on the body of a 42-year-old Caucasian female identified as Morgan Ellis. The autopsy report I completed on Morgan Ellis has been identified as [Exhibit #5](#). Positive identification was established via confirmation from the family.
5. The autopsy was conducted at the Taylor County morgue facility in accordance with standard forensic protocols, which entail a full external examination, a layer-by-layer internal dissection, photographic documentation, X-ray imaging, and the collection of bodily fluids for comprehensive toxicological screening.
6. The decedent weighed 142 pounds and measured 65 inches. The body was received in a standard body bag. When examined, the decedent was dressed in civilian clothing that exhibited tearing, grease staining, and glass fragments embedded within the fabric weave, all consistent with a violent motor vehicle collision. Corporal Chris Mendez provided me with the collision scene photo of Morgan Ellis's van, as marked in [Exhibit #3](#), which corroborated my examination.

- 29 7. The external examination revealed extensive abrasions, commonly called road rash.
30 There were many contusions, and superficial lacerations concentrated primarily along the
31 left side. These injuries demonstrated a clear left to right directional trajectory of force.
32 There were no pre-existing external marks, scars, or injuries unrelated to the mechanical
33 forces of the crash.
- 34 8. A standard Y-shaped incision was made to expose the thoracic and abdominal cavities.
35 The internal examination revealed catastrophic skeletal failures and deep tissue trauma,
36 which I have categorized by anatomical region below.
- 37 9. The scalp revealed a massive, depressed basilar skull fracture spanning the left temporal
38 and eye socket. The brain exhibited severe hemorrhaging and extensive contusions along
39 the left hemisphere. There was significant brainstem laceration.
- 40 10. Dissection of the posterior neck revealed a complete transection fracture of the C2 and C3
41 cervical vertebrae, commonly referred to as a severe deceleration/hyperextension injury,
42 resulting in immediate and catastrophic disruption of the spinal cord.
- 43 11. The rib cage exhibited multiple segmental fractures of left ribs three through nine, and
44 right ribs four through six. The fractured left ribs caused secondary penetrating
45 lacerations into the left lung lobe, resulting in a massive left hemothorax. I found an
46 accumulation of approximately 800 mL of blood in the pleural cavity. The aorta exhibited
47 a partial transverse tear, a classic hallmark of rapid, high-velocity deceleration.
- 48 12. This collection of injuries documented during the autopsy process allows for a precise
49 scientific reconstruction of the mechanical forces acting upon Morgan Ellis at the time of
50 the incident. The severe left-sided rib fractures and left-hemisphere cranial trauma
51 indicate a primary, high-velocity lateral impact, like a T-bone style or heavy rear corner
52 hit, forcing the driver side of the vehicle violently inward. The cervical spine transection
53 and aortic tearing are direct results of extreme, rapid deceleration and rotational kinetic
54 energy. Perfectly correlating with a vehicle being clipped at an extreme speed and
55 subsequently undergoing a violent, multi-axis vehicular rollover event. In layman's terms,
56 the decedent was involved with a very severe automobile accident that probably had a
57 low percentage of survivability due to the circumstances.

13. Comprehensive toxicological screening was performed on samples of the decedent's femoral blood, vitreous humor, and urine. The screening panels returned negative for alcohol, illicit narcotics, prescription pharmaceuticals, or any other potentially impairing chemical substances. Morgan Ellis had zero chemical foreign bodies in her system at the time of her death. Furthermore, internal examination of her vital organs revealed an entirely healthy, active 42-year-old female with no pre-existing underlying natural pathologies that could have contributed to a loss of vehicle control.
14. As part of my official death investigation, my office took custody of the physical personal effects recovered from the interior of the victim's silver 2018 Honda Odyssey minivan. Extensive roadway evidence was provided by the SCHP to include both the Accident Report marked as [Exhibit #2](#), and the expanded accident diagram marked as [Exhibit #10](#). It is my professional opinion, formed to an absolute degree of medical and scientific certainty, Morgan Ellis was operating her vehicle in a normal, lawful manner, well within the posted speed limits, with zero chemical impairment. I understand that Morgan Ellis's driving record was impeccable, no tickets, no citations, and there is no indication that she was driving anything but safely on the evening of August 14th.
15. This was the first autopsy that I have performed on a victim of street racing. More likely because of dumb luck. I have heard about illegal street racing in Taylor County, but this is the first fatality. Children these days should know they are not invincible and doing illegal things can be tragic like the death of Morgan Ellis.
16. The decedent was subjected to a sudden, unforeseen, and forceful high-velocity lateral collision initiated by another vehicle traveling at extreme speed. The massive mechanical force transmitted into the interior of the car caused immediate, non-survivable trauma to the central nervous system, brainstem, and cardiovascular system.
17. I determined the cause of death for Morgan Ellis to be craniocerebral and cervical spinal trauma resulting from blunt force injuries. Based on the evidence establishing that these fatal injuries were the direct result of an intentional, reckless, and illegal competitive drag race on a public highway, the manner of death is formally classified as homicide. This was a senseless death that could have been avoided.

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Avery Lane

Dr. Avery Lane

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the South Carolina Mock Trial Competition.

C.H. Graves

C.H. Graves, Notary Public

State of South Carolina

My Commission Expires: 12/10/29

Affidavit of
Tristan Vance

(Defendant)

- 1 1. My name is Tristan Vance. I am 27 years old, born on April 3, 1999, and I reside at 412
2 Oakridge Drive in the suburbs of West Jasper, South Carolina. I graduated from SC
3 Community College in 2020 with an Associate Degree in Business Administration. For the
4 past six years, I have worked as a certified claims adjuster for Apex Shield Assurance, a
5 position that requires a deep understanding of traffic laws, vehicle safety standards, and
6 responsible driving behavior.
- 7 2. I have held a completely valid, unblemished driver's license since the age of 16. Prior to
8 the tragic events of August 14, 2026, I had zero history of reckless driving, driving under
9 the influence, speeding convictions, or any moving violations on my license. My clean
10 record reflects my genuine commitment to public safety. I have the nickname of "Turbo."
11 A friend of mine thought it was funny to tag me with it after my one and only speeding
12 ticket back in high school. The ticket got thrown out because the officer did not show up
13 for court on the day of the trial, so I still have a clean driving record.
- 14 3. I am an active and passionate automotive enthusiast. I have invested substantial time,
15 personal savings, and meticulous labor into customizing my 2021 Dark Carbon Ford
16 Mustang GT. My dedication to this hobby is rooted entirely in cosmetic car shows,
17 organized track-days, and exhibition displays, all legal under South Carolina law.
- 18 4. The local street racing community, and individuals like Jody James, know my car because
19 it looks good and is high-performing. They do not know me personally. I have actively
20 avoided the dangerous subculture of street racing. The Nitrous Oxide System (NOS)
21 canisters located in my trunk were installed strictly as empty, non-functional show pieces
22 to earn modification points at competitive car meets. They were inactive on the night in
23 question. A picture of the trunk of my Mustang showing the canisters has been marked as
24 [Exhibit #4](#).
- 25 5. On August 14, 2026, at approximately 10:50 PM, I stopped to fill up my Mustang at the
26 Shell Gas Station located on American Legion Road, about 3 miles west of the SC Route 4
27 intersection. I had spent the evening cleaning my car, which is part of my weekly routine.

- 28 6. While I was standing at the pump, a heavily modified, dark-tinted silver sedan, which I
29 recognized to be a late-model BMW M5 Competition, pulled up to an adjacent pump.
30 Photos of my Mustang and the BMW can be seen as shown in [Exhibit #9](#). I don't know why
31 the State Trooper waited so long to go ask for security camera footage, but by the time
32 they did, the only thing that hadn't been recorded over was a couple of photos. The driver
33 did not exit the vehicle to buy fuel. Instead, he rolled down his window, stared at me with
34 open hostility, and began aggressively revving his engine, causing it to loudly pop and
35 backfire, which is a sign of a 2-step tuning map. Part of a 2-step tuning map means that
36 the engine takes in more fuel than is necessary for combustion while sitting at idle. When
37 the engine is revved and then let off, excess fuel goes out the exhaust and the heat of the
38 exhaust ignites it making for the pop and backfire sounds. Unfortunately, none of the
39 photos showed who the driver was, and I didn't recognize him.
- 40 7. The driver began shouting obscenities at me. While I could not distinguish every word
41 over the roar of his modified exhaust, he repeatedly used terms like "fake," "all show,"
42 and challenged me to run my car. He pointed aggressively in the direction of SC Route 4. I
43 shook my head, turned my back on him, finished pumping gas, and left immediately
44 because I didn't feel safe.
- 45 8. Upon leaving the gas station to head home, I realized the silver BMW had pulled out
46 directly behind me. He did not merely follow me; he was tailgating me, swerving back and
47 forth, and flashing his high beams. At speeds of 40–45 MPH coming down American Legion
48 Road, the driver rode like a foot off my rear bumper. Over the course of three miles to the
49 SC Route 4 intersection, the BMW terrified me with his road rage. He would accelerate
50 rapidly, cut directly in front of my hood, and slam on his brakes, forcing me to
51 aggressively brake to avoid a rear-end collision. Every time I attempted to safely change
52 lanes to get out of the way, the BMW would violently swerve across the double yellow
53 lines to block my path, trapping me.
- 54 9. As we neared the intersection of American Legion Road and SC Route 4, the BMW pulled
55 parallel to my passenger side window. The driver rolled down his window, screamed at
56 me, and raised something in his right hand, waving it aggressively. Eli Quinn who was

riding with me in the passenger seat yelled "He's got a gun!" I believed with absolute certainty the BMW driver was going to shoot me.

10. Trapped, and in a state of sheer panic, I made a split-second survival decision. I knew three and a half miles down the River Road Straightaway sits the sheriff's substation, a 24-hour, well-lit station in a heavily populated area. My sole focus was putting physical distance between myself and an armed, crazy person in order to save my own life, and to save Eli Quinn's life.

11. When I turned onto SC Route 4, the BMW tried to pinch my vehicle against the right-hand curb. I floored the accelerator in a desperate attempt to break away from him. I acknowledge that my vehicle reached an extreme speed of 104 MPH; however, this was not an "ego-driven drag race" or a hunt for a "trophy." It was a high-speed escape from a deadly threat. The 92–96% open throttle recorded on my Engine Control Module (ECM) was not me racing, but my terror as I tried to reach the safety of the sheriff's substation. I know what the throttle percentage was because the police pulled the data off of my ECM using something similar to the software I used to tune my Mustang as I was developing the car. The police were surprised that there was only two days worth of data. That's no surprise, I like to keep my car clean and the ECM is no exception. Every week I clear the data off. Usually that's on Friday for me. HP Tuners is a piece of software which allows you to clear the digital clutter in an ECM.

12. I did not line up side-by-side with the BMW at any starting line, nor did I look for or acknowledge a "starter's signal." If there was a crowd gathered on the shoulder of the road, I was completely oblivious to them; my eyes were locked entirely on the road ahead and the headlights of the stalker in my rearview mirror.

13. As I neared mile marker 12.4, traveling at high speed, the silver BMW utilized its higher horsepower to close the gap. The driver deliberately veered inward, ramming his front bumper violently into the rear driver-side quarter-panel of my Mustang. This crash damage matches the non-factory silver paint transfer documented on my rear quarter panel and bumper cover by Trooper Mendez. This was not a minor bump, it was like a PIT maneuver the police do to try and spin out and crash someone, by an aggressive, high-

86 speed rear-quarter bumper tap, capable of instantly destabilizing a rear-wheel-drive
87 sports car. I think PIT actually means Pursuit Intervention Technique. You can clearly see
88 the damage in the pictures marked as [Exhibit #3](#), and [Exhibit #7](#).

89 14. Immediately upon impact, I heard a deafening "pop" as my left-rear tire blew out. The
90 sudden loss of tire pressure and the impact from the BMW rendered my vehicle entirely
91 unstable. The steering wheel violently jerked out of my grip. As many know, the Mustang
92 is a car notorious for instability at high speeds if the rear end breaks loose and loses
93 traction.

94 15. The rapid lateral steering input recorded on my ECM, the 42-degree left swerve, was not
95 an intentional "slingshot racing maneuver." It was the uncontrollable yaw response of a
96 vehicle whose rear tire had just been compromised at triple-digit speeds. I was fighting
97 the physics of a spinning car, desperately attempting to counter-steer to keep from
98 flipping.

99 16. Because of the blinding headlights of the BMW and the spinning of my vehicle, I never saw
100 Morgan Ellis's minivan until the absolute fraction of a second before my passenger side
101 clipped it. I had zero time to react or slam on the brakes prior to the impact. Then my
102 vehicle skipped across the asphalt. We survived the collision purely by chance, and went
103 almost another mile before my car ground to a stop on the destroyed left rear rim.

104 17. Sometime after we were stopped on the side of the road, a SC Highway Patrol car pulled
105 up. Cpl. Mendez got out to talk with us. Mendez asked what happened and how we ended
106 up at this location. I told the State Trooper what happened with the BMW. As soon as I
107 stopped talking, Mendez told us that we needed to hear our Miranda warnings before
108 continuing to talk. That felt scary, but I know I hadn't done anything wrong, so I continued
109 to answer questions. I don't think Mendez believed anything I had to say. Some cops just
110 think if you have a nice, fast car, you must be into racing and other illegal things. Mendez
111 told us someone had been killed in the impact with my car. I was stunned and shocked. I
112 could not imagine hurting anyone, much less killing someone.

113 18. I did not flee the scene. I did not flee the scene! I was in shock and disorientated.

114 Furthermore, my car was completely disabled with a blown tire, and I was terrified that

the aggressive driver in the silver BMW—who had flashed a weapon and just crashed into me—was still pursuing me to finish what he had started.

19. I am profoundly devastated by the loss of Morgan Ellis. The idea of being in a crash where someone died gives me nightmares. But I want to say I am here with a clear conscience. I was not a street racer that night, and I did not treat that highway like a private track. The only reason my Mustang ever touched Morgan Ellis’s van was because the BMW crashed into me and I could not control the car. I am the victim here, the victim of an unprovoked, road-rage attack, and my actions that night were a desperate attempt to survive.

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Tristan Vance

Tristan Vance

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the South Carolina Mock Trial Competition.

Michala Watson

Michala Watson, Notary Public
State of South Carolina
My Commission Expires: 4/3/29

Affidavit of
Casey Miller

(Professional Engineer)

1. My name is Casey Miller, and I am a licensed Professional Engineer in South Carolina, specializing in automotive engineering, forensic vehicle failure analysis, and kinetic accident reconstruction. I am currently the Principal Forensic Engineer at my company, Miller Automotive Forensic Consulting, LLC, a position I have held for the past eight years.
2. I am 39 years old, born and raised in the automotive-manufacturing hub of Detroit, Michigan. I developed an early understanding of vehicle dynamics and mechanical design. My Mom was an engineer with Ford, and she designed the suspension system on the first generation of the Ford Escort. Dad worked as an engineer for a subsidiary of Ford, doing steering rack system design on the F150 and F250 trucks.
3. I attended Michigan State University, where I earned my Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering in 2008. To expand my skill set, I went on to earn my Master of Science in Automotive Engineering from Clemson University in 2011. My graduate thesis focused specifically on “The Effects of Sudden Pneumatic Depressurization on Multi-Link Suspension Stability at High Velocities.”
4. Prior to entering private consulting, I spent six years working as a Senior Vehicle Dynamics Engineer for BMW. I also worked with the BMW Performance Testing Center in Greer, SC. In this capacity, I was directly responsible for designing, testing, and analyzing high-speed handling characteristics, electronic stability control algorithms, and physical crash-test telemetry. I also directed BMW’s performance driving school, which is a program to train individual drivers how to handle extreme driving conditions and avoid road accidents.
5. My advanced credentials and specialized training include Certified Component Failure Analyst through the Society of Automotive Engineers, Advanced Forensic Tire Failure Analysis Certification from the Monroe Forensic Institute, and full accreditation as a Traffic Accident Reconstructionist.
6. Over my 14-year career, I have personally inspected and analyzed over 350 vehicle failures and high-speed impacts. I have been qualified as an expert witness in automotive engineering and crash dynamics in state and federal courts on 42 occasions. I was retained by the defense to conduct an independent forensic engineering analysis of the

physical evidence in the *State of South Carolina v. Tristan Vance*. I earn a rate of \$550 per hour for analysis, and \$700 per hour for court testimony. I have roughly 29 hours of time involved so far, not counting my testimony today.

7. On September 2, 2026, I conducted a comprehensive, multi-point physical and mechanical inspection of Vance's 2021 Ford Mustang GT at the secure SC Highway Patrol (SCHP) impound facility. Photos of the Mustang at the impound yard, as well as a close-up of the paint transfer, and a photo of the Nitrous Oxide System (NOS) have been marked as Exhibit #3, Exhibit #7, and Exhibit #4 respectively. At the request of the defense attorney, I summarized my findings in a report that is marked as [Exhibit #8](#). I conducted a meticulous inspection of the Mustang's rear bumper fascia, quarter panels, and rear impact reinforcement bars. I identified a pronounced area of metallic silver paint transfer located on the rear driver-side quarter-panel and bumper cover. Spectrographic analysis of this paint transfer confirms that it is non-factory silver paint containing specific metallic flake structures that do not match the manufacturing paint profile of Morgan Ellis's silver Honda Odyssey minivan.
8. I examined the friction stripping evidence. The paint transfer exhibits clear, linear micro-striations and striation gouging with a distinct back-to-front directional trajectory. This physical evidence proves a high-energy kinetic contact event occurred where a third, metallic silver vehicle made forceful contact with the rear-quarter panel of Vance's Mustang. The alignment of the scuffing is entirely consistent with a lateral "PIT maneuver" or an aggressive, high-speed rear-quarter bumper tap, capable of instantly destabilizing a rear-wheel-drive sports car. This paint indicates a high-speed impact and corroborates the statement that the paint transfer was from a silver BMW M5 Competition model. However, there is no way to determine when this transfer occurred.
9. I performed a highly detailed microscopic and structural analysis on the deflated left-rear tire and wheel assembly of Vance's vehicle. This analysis included a dual-column gas chromatograph, HP Model 5710a with flame analyzing detectors. The SCHP's report attributes the tire failure to post-collision damage or a "blown tire" from impacting the minivan. My engineering analysis directly refutes this conclusion.

- 58 10. The left rear tire exhibited a clean, linear penetrating puncture through the sidewall of the
59 tire, measuring approximately 4 inches in length. Under digital magnification, the steel
60 belts within the tire casing showed sharp, immediate shearing forces with zero fraying.
61 There was evidence of sudden depressurization of the tire. The interior liner of the tire
62 lacked the characteristic scoring "run-flat wrinkling" that occurs when a tire loses air
63 gradually. This is all characteristic of a catastrophic and immediate failure of the tire. It is
64 clear when a vehicle traveling at 104 MPH, covering 152.5 feet per second, suffers a
65 sudden, catastrophic loss of pressure in a rear drive tire, the handling dynamics change
66 instantly and violently. At triple-digit speeds, a sudden blowout causes an immediate,
67 uncommanded asymmetric drag force acting on that corner of the vehicle; a total and
68 immediate loss of steering precision and rear lateral tracking; and an extreme slip angle
69 that triggers an involuntary chassis yaw.
- 70 11. The 42-degree rapid steering change recorded on the ECM was not a "racing swerve" or a
71 "slingshot pass." From an engineering standpoint, it was the uncontrollable mechanical
72 yaw of a chassis suffering an immediate tire blowout while potentially undergoing rear-
73 quarter compression from an external vehicle impact. A driver under these conditions is
74 completely a passenger. No amount of human steering input or electronic stability
75 control could prevent the car from sliding laterally.
- 76 12. The prosecution has placed heavy emphasis on the presence of nitrous oxide canisters in
77 the trunk to imply the car was primed for an illegal drag race. I conducted a complete
78 physical and pneumatic tracing of the entire engine bay and trunk compartment. My
79 inspection revealed that while the two canisters were physically secured in the trunk
80 enclosure, the primary high-pressure braided feed lines were completely disconnected
81 from the motor.
- 82 13. Cpl. Mendez asserts that the lack of brake application prior to impact indicates a
83 premeditated racing maneuver. This analysis fails to account for human factors. In a
84 scenario where a driver is blindsided by a rear-quarter impact and simultaneous high-
85 speed tire blowout, the vehicle enters a rapid, spinning slide. The driver's immediate,
86 instinctive reaction is to fight with the steering wheel to stay on the blacktop, which is

called counter-steering, rather than executing a brake transition. The lack of braking pressure supports the scenario of a driver frantically trying to recover a spinning car after a tire failure.

14. Jody James claims to have heard engine modifications and "popping" indicative of a racing launch control. My inspection of the Mustang's aftermarket exhaust system confirmed it utilizes an open-valve, high-flow exhaust system. This system naturally produces heavy deceleration pops, gurgles, and backfires during normal deceleration and rapid acceleration regardless of whether a vehicle is using electronic launch control or street racing. James's interpretation relies on visual and auditory bias associated with the car's appearance rather than isolated technical reality and I question Jody James' expertise over my own on this point.

15. The 2018 Honda Odyssey Minivan had a recall notice for a side curtain airbag component of the standard Supplemental Restraint System. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) on April 20, 2026, issued Vehicle Recall Notice 26V227. A copy of that recall has been marked as [Exhibit #11](#). This recall included more than 440,000 Odyssey minivans built between 2018 and 2022. NHTSA determined that a programming error in the Supplemental Restraint System could allow the side curtain airbags in these vehicles to inflate suddenly and without warning if the vehicle hits a hard road hazard, such as a pothole or speed bump which could result in a dangerous driving condition, including complete loss of vehicle control by the driver.

16. It is my professional opinion, to a reasonable degree of engineering and scientific certainty, that it is more likely that the minivan driven by Morgan Ellis suffered a sudden and unintended deployment of the side-curtain airbags. The airbag deployment rendered the driver unable to control the vehicle which resulted in complete loss of control. The physical and digital evidence on Vance's vehicle does not support a two-car, coordinated drag race. Instead, the mechanics of this collision are entirely consistent with the explanation provided by Tristan Vance.

17. Vance was traveling at high speed when the Mustang sustained a high-energy external bumper impact from an aggressive vehicle, verified by non-factory silver paint transfer

116 and linear micro-striations on the rear driver-side quarter-panel. Concurrently or
117 immediately following this impact, the vehicle suffered an instantaneous, catastrophic
118 left-rear tire failure.

119 18. The combination of the lateral impact force and the total loss of rear tire tracking created
120 an uncontrollable, immediate mechanical yaw, forcing the Mustang into an involuntary
121 lateral path that intersected with the decedent's minivan.

122 19. The physical evidence proves that at the time control was lost, Tristan Vance's vehicle was
123 mechanically compromised to a degree that rendered it entirely impossible to control.
124 This completely undermines the theory of an intentional, controlled, competitive racing
125 maneuver.

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Casey Miller

Casey Miller, MS, PE

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the South Carolina Mock Trial Competition.

Miriam Wrenn

Miriam Wrenn, Notary Public

State of South Carolina

My Commission Expires: 12/08/31

Affidavit of
Eli Quinn

(passenger)

1. My name is Eli Quinn, and I am 26 years old. I currently reside at 884 Elm Street, Apt. 3B, outside of East River, South Carolina in Taylor County. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2021 and am presently employed as a Senior Designer for West River Digital Solutions.
2. I met Tristan Vance in our freshman year at Valley Technical High School over a decade ago. I will admit Tristan is a close friend. I can attest to Tristan's excellent character, personal ethics, and perfect driving habits. Tristan has always been a protective, level-headed, and cautious individual. Tristan is someone who values stability and has never shown a predisposition toward reckless, criminal, or thrill-seeking behavior. I gave Tristan the nickname, Turbo, you know, after the cartoon movie in 2013 with the snail that raced against cars, after Tristan got a ticket driving us to school one morning when we were trying to beat the opening bell. I don't know how fast we were driving, but I remember even though I was wearing my seatbelt, my head hit the ceiling of the car when we went over a dip in the road. However, the ticket was dropped because the officer did not show up at traffic court.
3. Like Tristan, I love the local car culture. I frequently go with Tristan to static, daytime automotive exhibitions, charity car shows, and organized track events. I am fully aware of the public stigma surrounding modified vehicles, and I know that people like Jody James assume anyone with a high-performance exhaust or cosmetic modifications is an illegal street racer. I know firsthand that Tristan treated the Mustang as a show piece, explicitly refusing to participate in the dangerous, illicit street racing events that plague River Road. Unfortunately, because street racers don't advertise, you can get caught up in a street takeover by accident.
4. I feel really bad about Morgan Ellis. Her death was tragic. But it was not Tristan's fault. I was a former student of Morgan Ellis, who taught me AP Art History during my junior year of high school. I deeply respected Ms. Ellis, and her loss has been profoundly devastating to me. I have no motive to shield Tristan from justice if Tristan truly was at fault. I am

testifying because the narrative being pushed by the prosecution is a complete distortion of the terror we experienced that night.

5. On the night of August 14, 2026, I was riding in the front passenger seat of Tristan's 2021 Ford Mustang GT. We had spent the evening preparing the car's exterior finish for a major regional show scheduled for the following morning. About 10:50 PM, we pulled into the Shell gas station on American Legion Road to top off the fuel tank.

6. While Tristan was pumping gas, an aggressively tuned, dark-tinted silver BMW sedan pulled into the gas pump next to us. The driver, who I never actually saw, remained inside his vehicle but rolled down his window and began screaming and cussing at Tristan. I don't think Tristan knew the BMW driver. Anyway, the BMW driver mocked the Mustang's cosmetic features and demanded a race. Tristan just ignored the taunts. The pictures from the gas station that the State Trooper recovered, clearly show both Tristan's Mustang and the Silver BMW. Those pictures are marked as [Exhibit #9](#).

7. We thought the BMW was gone, but the moment we pulled onto American Legion Road toward River Road, the silver BMW aggressively drove up beside us. The BMW swerving violently and aggressively drove toward us and positioned itself less than three feet from our rear bumper. Tristan tried to get away from the BMW driver. For several blocks, the driver of the silver BMW engaged in what, to me, was a form of vehicular assault. He would tailgate us, then he would zip around to get in front of us just to slam on his brakes and brake-check us.

8. As we made the turn onto the SC Route 4, referred to as the River Road Straightaway, we came across one of the pop-up street racing events. I didn't know any of the people in the crowd that we were driving slowly between. We had to creep along to not hit any of the people who were standing along the road or darting across the street presumably to get a better view of whoever was going to be racing. The crowd seemed to think that we were part of the street racing. They seemed to be cheering us on. That is when the silver BMW pulled up beside us right next to my window on the passenger side. The driver of the BMW with his window down continued to scream and cuss at Tristan. I still couldn't see the

56 driver. I did see him waving what I believed with absolute certainty that he was holding a
57 gun. I was scared he was going to shoot me through the passenger window.

58 9. I am not afraid to say that I panicked. I began screaming at Tristan: "Get us out of here! He
59 has a gun! Just go, please, get us away from him!" Tristan understood my fear and hit the
60 gas. I still think it is funny the crowd started cheering as if this was something planned. As
61 we started accelerating, the driver of the BMW also stepped on the gas as he hurled a
62 metal object directly at our car. The object struck the lower right-hand corner of our
63 windshield with a deafening impact, web-cracking the glass right in front of my face.

64 10. We took off quickly, but it was not a competitive "drag race launch." Tristan did not line
65 up at an informal starting line, nor did Tristan look for a crowd or a race signal. Tristan
66 took off because I was begging to get out of there. Tristan was saving our lives. We both
67 knew that a sheriff's substation was about four miles farther down River Road as you start
68 getting to a more populated area. I figured that if we couldn't get away from the BMW
69 before then, then it may back off when the BMW driver saw the sheriff's substation. So,
70 our speed was a desperate, panicked escape to get to a safe place and get and law
71 enforcement intervention.

72 11. I don't know how fast we were going, but it felt much faster than I drive on the
73 interstate. Despite Tristan doing their best to get us away, the silver BMW refused to
74 break off pursuit. He matched our speed and chased us into the darkness.

75 12. When we were past where the racing crowd could see us, I saw the BMW rapidly close the
76 distance from behind and then I felt a violent, jarring slam from the rear driver-side of the
77 car. The BMW intentionally rammed into Tristan's Mustang!

78 13. Instantaneously with the impact, I heard a deafening "pop" and then the entire car
79 dropped violently on the left side. The car immediately went into an uncontrollable
80 sideways slide. I glanced over to Tristan who had no control of what was going on. The
81 picture from the impound yard marked as [Exhibit #3](#) shows the side damage and the
82 blown tire on Tristan's Mustang. The photo marked as [Exhibit #7](#) is a close up of the silver
83 paint on Tristan's Mustang.

- 84 14. Our vehicle was completely unstable. The quick steering wheel movements Tristan
85 made—which are not the "racing swerves" as described by the prosecution. They were a
86 desperate, frantic attempt to catch the car and prevent us from rolling over as the vehicle
87 slammed sideways. Tristan was fighting against the blown tire and trying to keep us on
88 the road after having been rammed by the BMW. I did not see the minivan until right
89 before we hit it. I don't think Tristan saw it either because Tristan was trying desperately
90 to recover from the BMW hitting us. Unfortunately, there was no time to brake. We were
91 entirely at the mercy of physics.
- 92 15. Following the collision, our car skipped down the highway before stopping on a destroyed
93 rear tire. Tristan kept driving to get away from the BMW. I was in shock. I was
94 hyperventilating. I was severely disoriented from being bounced around the car. I never
95 saw where the BMW went and I have never seen that car or the driver since then. I have
96 asked around and no one can tell me who or where the BMW went. But if we find him, I am
97 sure he would back up my and Tristan's story about the evening of August 14th. I know no
98 one else saw the accident, so you have to believe me and Tristan since we are the only
99 eyewitnesses.
- 100 16. Sometime after we came to a stop, a SC Highway Patrol car stopped behind us. The State
101 Trooper was Cpl. Mendez. At first, we were thankful to see a police officer. That didn't last
102 long. Cpl. Mendez asked how we got here and what happened to the car. Tristan
103 explained what happened with the BMW. As soon as Tristan explained the sequence of
104 events, the Trooper stopped and read us our *Miranda* warnings. We continued answering
105 questions from Cpl. Mendez. Mendez said we were racing and caused the death of Morgan
106 Ellis. We were in complete shock and total disbelief that someone had died. Mendez
107 wondered if we had fled the scene of the accident on purpose. Later, I saw the diagram of
108 the accident scene, marked as [Exhibit #10](#).
- 109 17. We did not remain at the immediate impact site because we were so scared of the BMW
110 driver. Tristan and I were in overwhelming terror that the driver of the silver BMW was
111 going to pull up beside us to kill us. Tristan's actions throughout this entire nightmare

112 were because we were trying to get away from a dangerous situation and to protect our
113 own lives from an active, violent assailant.

WITNESS ADDENDUM

I have reviewed this statement, and I have nothing of significance to add at this time. The material facts are true and correct.

Signed,

Eli Quinn

Eli Quinn

SIGNED AND SWORN to me before 8:00 a.m. on the day of this round of the South Carolina Mock Trial Competition.

A.G. Molli

A.G. Molli, Notary Public

State of South Carolina

My Commission Expires: 12/15/29

EXHIBITS AVAILABLE TO BOTH PARTIES

The parties have stipulated the authenticity of the trial exhibits listed below. The Court will, therefore, not entertain objections to the authenticity of these trial exhibits. The parties have reserved any objections to the admissibility of any of these exhibits until the trial of the case. The trial exhibits may be introduced by either party, subject to the Rules of Evidence and the stipulations of the parties contained in the materials.

EXHIBIT #	EXHIBIT DESCRIPTION
1	Transcript of 911 Dispatch
2	SC Highway Patrol Accident Report
3	Photos of crash involved vehicles
4	Photo of Nitrous Oxide System in Vance Mustang
5	Autopsy report of Morgan Ellis
6	Witness ledger and betting sheets
7	Photos of silver paint transfer on Tristan Vance's Mustang
8	Engineering report of Casey Miller
9	Shell gas station security footage (Photos)
10	Blown up map of River Road crash site – SC Route 4
11	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Honda Odyssey minivans recall
12	Vitae of Casey Miller

The parties reserve the right to dispute any other legal or factual conclusions based on these items and to make objections to these items based on other evidentiary issues.

Exhibit #1 Transcript of 911 Dispatch

Dispatch Agency: Taylor County Consolidated Emergency Services

Date: August 14, 2026

Event Log Summary

Timestamp	Unit	Logged Event Description
23:06:51	Dispatch	Emergency 911. Is your emergency Police, Fire, or Medical?
23:06:54	Caller	It's everything! There is a bad wreck and a minivan flipped over
23:07:00	Dispatch	I need your name and location please.
23:07:03	Caller	Look there was street racing and I'm not going to give you my name. the wreck happened down on the River Road Straightaway, where everyone goes to race. It is SC Route 4 past Arlington Road. I gotta go now.
23:07:12	Dispatch	Please stay on the line while I contact EMS.
23:07:15	Dispatch	EMS-02, prepare to copy
23:07:19	EMS-02	EMS-02. Go ahead dispatch
23:07:23	Dispatch	Report of a rollover collision on SC Route 4 past Arlington Road.
23:07:27	EMS-02	EMS-02 copies. We are en route.
23:07:30	Dispatch	Taylor Fire Rescue 15, prepare to copy.
23:07:38	Rescue 15	Dispatch, Rescue 15.
23:07:41	Dispatch	Report of a rollover collision on SC Route 4 past Arlington Road
23:07:46	Rescue 15	Rescue 15 copies. We are en route.
23:07:51	Dispatch	SCHP 1881, prepare to copy.
23:08:01	SCHP1881	Dispatch, SCHP 1881.
23:08:06	Dispatch	Report of a rollover collision on SC Route 4 past Arlington Road.
23:08:10	SCHP1881	SCHP 1881 copies. En route now.
23:13:11	EMS-02	Dispatch, EMS-02 on scene.
23:13:15	Rescue 15	Dispatch, Rescue 15 on scene.
23:13:19	Dispatch	Dispatch copies EMS-02 and Rescue 15 on scene.
23:20:01	EMS-02	Dispatch, please notify Coroner's Office to this location.
23:20:06	Dispatch	Copy, notifying Coroner's Office to your location.
23:24:50	SCHP1881	Dispatch, SCHP 1881 on scene.
23:24:56	Dispatch	Dispatch copies SCHP 1881 on scene.

Exhibit #2 SC Highway Patrol Accident Report

ORIGINAL

D.P.S. USE ONLY		Page #	SOUTH CAROLINA TRAFFIC COLLISION REPORT FORM		# Of Units	Amended - Match Only of Original Report	Notified	Arrived
08/14/2026		23:08	TR-310 (Rev. 01/2001)			Consented		23:24
Live:	Time	County	1- Interstate 2- US Primary 3- SC Primary	4- Secondary 5- County 6- Other	Collision Location (Rt. # / Name) SC State Route 4		0-Main 2-Alternate 5-Spur	6-Connection 7-Business
23:24		TY			Base Intersection (Rt. # / Name) American Legion Rd.		Mees: 1 Dr. In / Near City or Town of: N E EAST RIVER S W	
Lane # / Dtr.	Distance Off	Direction	1- Interstate 2- US Primary 3- SC Primary	4- Secondary 5- County 6- Other	Base Intersection (Rt. # / Name) American Legion Rd.		0-Main 2-Alternate 5-Spur	4-Connection 7-Business 6-Other
#	C?	N E S W	Miles Feet	N E S W	Second Intersection (Rt. # / Name) Arlington Rd.		0-Main 2-Alternate 5-Spur	4-Connection 7-Business 6-Other
R.R. In.	From	Rem Only	To	1- Interstate 2- US Primary 3- SC Primary	Second Intersection (Rt. # / Name) Arlington Rd.		0-Main 2-Alternate 5-Spur	4-Connection 7-Business 6-Other
N E S W	1- Entrance 2- Exit	N E S W		1- Interstate 2- US Primary 3- SC Primary			0-Main 2-Alternate 5-Spur	4-Connection 7-Business 6-Other
N-267436			Driver/Pedestrian's Full Name Morgan Ellis			N-267437		
Unit	Enx	Raze	Street/R.F.D. 31 Village Lane			Street/R.F.D. 412 Oakridge Drive		
1			City, State, & Zip East River, SC 29991			City, State, & Zip West Jasper, SC 29109		
Birth Date	03/02/1984		City, State, & Zip East River, SC 29991			Birth Date 04/03/1999		
State	Driver's License #	SC-98421057	Insurance Company State Farm Insurance			State		
SC	Year	2018	Body	Vehicle Make	VIN #	Year		
			VN	Honda	5FNRL6H28JB000001	2021		
State	Year	2026	Year	2021	Body	Vehicle Make	VIN #	1FA6P8CF6M5100001
SC	2026	CGT 981	2021	CPE	Ford	SC4U 277	Owner's D.L. #	SC 40398124
Home Telephone (803) 555-2611			Owner's Full Name Morgan Ellis			Home Telephone (803) 555-1911		
Bus. Telephone ()			Street/R.F.D. 31 Village Lane			Owner's Full Name Tristan Vance		
Contributed To Collision Yes No			City, State, & Zip East River, SC 29991			Street/R.F.D. 412 Oakridge Drive		
Estimated Speed 45			Speed Limit 45			Contributed To Collision Yes No		
C.D.L. Reg. Yes No			T.B. & Reg. Yes No			City, State, & Zip West Jasper, SC 29109		
Summons #			Code			Summons #		
Allofing info (see back): Yes No			Code			Towed By		
N-267438			Driver/Pedestrian's Full Name Alleged 3rd vehicle - Silver BMW			State		
Unit	Sex	Naxe	Street/R.F.D.			Home Telephone		
			City, State, & Zip			Owner's Full Name		
Birth Date			City, State, & Zip			Bus. Telephone		
State	Driver's License #	Insurance Company		Contributed To Collision Yes No			City, State, & Zip	
Year	Body	Vehicle Make	VIN #	Estimated Speed 104			Speed Limit 45	
				C.D.L. Reg. Yes No			T.B. & Reg. Yes No	
				Summons #			Code	
				Allofing info (see back): Yes No			Code	
Dir. of Travel: Unit 1: N S E W Unit 2: N S E W Unit 3: N S E W			Code			Towed By		

SOUTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL MAIT
SC ROUTE 4 "River Road Straightaway (River Road Drive)"

ROADWAY OVERVIEW:
SCALE: 1 INCH = APPROX. 20 FEET

Vehicle 1 traveling at 104 MPH (in a 45 MPH Zone) executed an aggressive, high-speed passing ("Slingshot" swerve). Vehicle 1 lost control, causing the front passenger-side fender contact with Vehicle 2's rear driver-side quarter panel. Vehicle 2 rolled over in the median, resulting in fatal injuries to Vehicle 2 driver. No braking input detected from Vehicle 1 prior to impact. Vehicle modifications (trunk-mounted NOS canisters) present in Vehicle 1

NOTICE - THE TR-310 IS FOR STATISTICAL REPORTING PURPOSES ONLY AND IS A REFLECTION OF THE OFFICER'S BEST KNOWLEDGE, OPINION, AND RELIEF CONCERNING THE COLLISION BUT NO WARRANTY IS MADE AS TO THE FACTUAL ACCURACY THEREOF.

Investigating Officer's Name Chris Mendez	Rank CPL	Badge # 1881	Code 86	Date 08/16/26	Reviewer's Name Daniel Hightower	Rank SGT	Internal Agency Code SCHP MAIT
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Exhibit #3 Images of crash involved vehicles

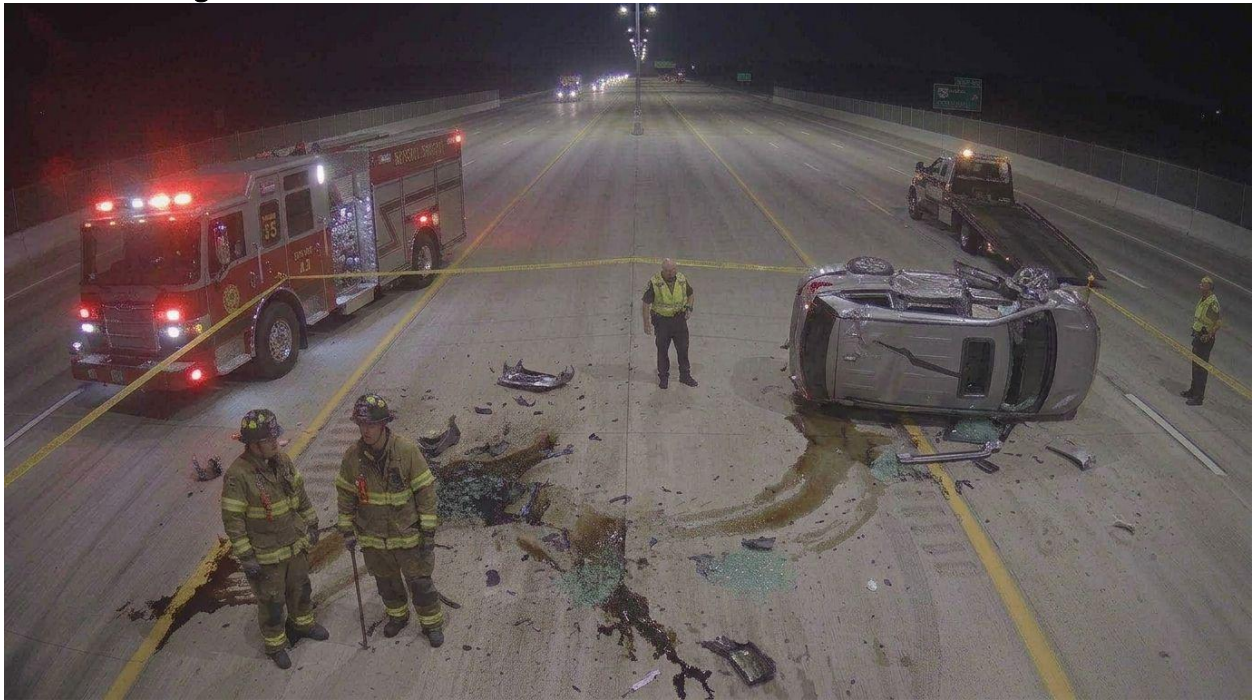


Exhibit #4 Image of trunk mounted Nitrous Oxide Systems canisters in Vance Mustang



Exhibit #5 Autopsy and Toxicology Report of Morgan Ellis

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, South Carolina Forensic Science Center

Case Number: 2026-A-0990

Date of Autopsy: August 17, 2026, 1:30 PM

Deceased: Morgan Ellis (42-year-old female, 5'5", 142 lbs)

Pathological Condition: Well-nourished, symmetrically developed adult female. Received in a standard body pouch wearing civilian clothing exhibiting tearing, grease staining, and embedded glass fragments.

External Injuries: Extensive abrasions (road rash), contusions, and superficial lacerations concentrated along the left side of the torso, upper left extremity, and left side of the cranium. Trajectory demonstrates a distinct left-to-right directional force. No pre-existing external marks, scars, or non-crash-related injuries.

Quantitative Toxicology Panels

Analytical Parameter	Result Obtained	Reference Range	Interpretation
Blood Alcohol Content (BAC)	0.00%	0.00%	Negative
Illicit Narcotics	Negative	Negative	Negative
Prescription Pharmaceuticals	Negative	Negative	Negative
Chemical Impairments	Negative	Negative	Negative

Central Nervous System: Massive, depressed basilar skull fracture spanning the left temporal and occipital bones; severe hemorrhaging and extensive cortical contusions along the left cerebral hemisphere; brainstem laceration secondary to eye socket dislocation.

Spinal Column: Complete transection fracture of the C2 and C3 cervical vertebrae (deceleration/hyperextension injury), resulting in immediate disruption of the spinal cord.

Thoracic Cavity: Segmental fractures of left ribs 3–9 and right ribs 4–6, with secondary penetrating lacerations into the left lung lobe resulting in a massive left hemothorax (~800 mL blood). Partial transverse tear of the aorta distal to the ligamentum arteriosum.

Cause of Death: Craniocerebral and cervical spinal trauma resulting from blunt force injuries.

Manner of Death: Homicide.

Exhibit #6 Witness Ledger and Betting Sheets

JODY'S LEDGER - RACING ACTION 2026

08/03/2026	Mustang	Bet In \$300	Payout \$570	Won by 1 car
08/03/2026	Black Camaro	Bet In \$250	Payout \$0	Lost
08/04/2026	Red Mustang	Bet In \$200	Payout \$0	Engine trouble
08/06/2026	Blue Charger	Bet In \$400	Payout \$760	Easy win
08/07/2026	Silver Corvette	Bet In \$300	Payout \$570	Close race
08/08/2026	Green Nissan GT-R	Bet In \$500	Payout \$950	Fastest run
08/09/2026	White Supra	Bet In \$350	Payout \$0	Jumped start
08/10/2026	Black Camaro	Bet In \$450	Payout \$855	Repeat winner
08/11/2026	Orange Challenger	Bet In \$275	Payout \$0	Lost by half length
08/13/2026	Gray BMW M4	Bet In \$325	Payout \$620	Good night
08/14/2026	Blue Charger	Bet In \$500	Payout \$950	Sweep
08/14/2026	Red Mustang	Bet In \$250	Payout \$475	Finally won
08/14/2026	Mustang	Bet In \$600	Payout \$1140	Big Money Race

TOTAL BETS TAKEN: \$11,350

TOTAL PAYOUTS: \$6,890

"Settle after Saturday" - JJ

Exhibit #7 Photo of silver paint transfer on Tristan Vance's Mustang



Exhibit #8 Engineering Report of Casey Miller (Page 1 of 2)

Prepared by: Casey Miller, P.E., ACTAR

Principal Forensic Engineer, Miller Automotive Forensic Consulting, LLC

At the request of the defense, I conducted an independent forensic engineering examination of the defendant's 2021 Ford Mustang GT on September 2, 2026, at the South Carolina Highway Patrol impound facility. My analysis included inspection of the vehicle's body damage, paint transfer evidence, tire failure characteristics, electronic vehicle data, and mechanical systems. The purpose of this examination was to determine whether the physical evidence supports the allegation that Mr. Vance was engaged in a coordinated drag race or whether an alternative explanation better accounts for the loss of vehicle control and resulting collision.

During my inspection, I identified a substantial area of metallic silver paint transfer located on the driver-side rear quarter panel and bumper area of the Mustang. Laboratory and spectrographic analysis determined that this paint transfer was not consistent with the factory paint composition of Morgan Ellis's Honda Odyssey. Under microscopic examination, the paint transfer contained directional striations and gouging marks indicating a high-energy contact event moving from the rear toward the front of the vehicle. These markings are consistent with forceful contact from another vehicle striking the rear quarter panel of the Mustang. In my professional opinion, the damage pattern is indicative of an external vehicle impact capable of destabilizing the Mustang immediately before the loss of control. I also conducted a detailed examination of the Mustang's left-rear tire, which was found deflated following the collision. The SC Highway Patrol report suggested the tire failed as a result of the crash; however, my analysis does not support that conclusion. The tire contained a linear puncture through the sidewall, measuring approximately 4 inches, with clean shearing of the internal steel belts and no evidence of progressive tearing or degradation. Additionally, the interior liner lacked the scoring and heat-related damage that normally occur when a tire loses air gradually. These findings are consistent with a sudden, catastrophic puncture caused by sharp roadway debris prior to the collision.

The significance of this tire failure cannot be overstated. At approximately 104 miles per hour, a sudden loss of pressure in a rear tire creates an immediate imbalance in vehicle dynamics. The result is rapid yaw, loss of rear traction, and a substantial reduction in directional control. Vehicle data showed a sudden steering correction of approximately 42 degrees. From an engineering standpoint, this steering input is consistent with a driver attempting to counter-steer and recover from an unexpected loss of control, rather than initiating an intentional racing maneuver. When coupled with evidence of a rear-quarter impact, the tire failure provides a highly plausible explanation for the Mustang's sudden instability.

The prosecution has emphasized the presence of nitrous oxide bottles found in the trunk as evidence that the vehicle was prepared for drag racing. I inspected the entire nitrous system and found that although the bottles were physically mounted in the trunk, the high-pressure

Exhibit #8 Engineering Report of Casey Miller (Page 2 of 2)

feed lines were disconnected. The system was not configured to deliver nitrous oxide to the engine. Consequently, there is no physical evidence demonstrating that nitrous oxide was being actively used at the time of the incident.

I also reviewed claims regarding the absence of braking prior to impact. In situations involving a sudden tire blowout and loss of vehicle control, drivers commonly react by attempting to steer and stabilize the vehicle rather than immediately applying the brakes. Human factors research and accident reconstruction experience demonstrate that a driver's first instinct in a high-speed spin is often to fight the steering wheel in an attempt to regain control. Therefore, the lack of brake application is consistent with an emergency loss-of-control event and should not be interpreted as evidence of intentional racing.

Further, witness statements describing exhaust noises such as popping and backfiring do not provide reliable evidence of drag racing. My inspection confirmed that the Mustang was equipped with an aftermarket high-flow exhaust system capable of producing loud pops, crackles, and backfires during both acceleration and deceleration. These sounds are common characteristics of modified performance exhaust systems and can occur during normal vehicle operation without any connection to launch-control systems or racing activity. I also considered information related to the 2018 Honda Odyssey operated by Morgan Ellis. Based on available information, potential alternative factors affecting the Odyssey's operation should be considered when evaluating overall causation. The investigation did not identify clear evidence that directly ties the actions of the Mustang alone to every aspect of the minivan's loss of control, and other contributing factors may exist.

Based upon my examination and analysis of the physical evidence, I conclude that the evidence does not support the theory of a coordinated two-vehicle drag race. Instead, the evidence is most consistent with a sequence of events in which the Mustang sustained a rear-quarter impact from another vehicle, followed by an immediate and catastrophic left-rear tire failure. The combination of these events would have produced an uncontrollable mechanical yaw and rendered the vehicle extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the driver to control.

The steering inputs recorded by the vehicle are consistent with recovery attempts, not competitive driving. In my professional opinion, the physical and mechanical evidence demonstrates that the Mustang was mechanically compromised before the collision and that the resulting loss of control was consistent with a vehicle emergency rather than an intentional racing maneuver.

Exhibit #9 Photos from Shell Gas Station



Exhibit #10 – Map of River Road Crash area

SOUTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY PATROL MAIT **SC ROUTE 4 “River Road Straightaway (River Road Drive)”**

ROADWAY OVERVIEW:
 SCALE: 1 INCH = APPROX. 20 FEET



VANCE MUSTANG (V1 - Dark Metallic Ford Mustang GT)
 V1 at—aprox. 104 MPH (3.2 seconds pre-impact,
 92%-66% throttle, 0 PSI brake pressure per ECU/EDR)

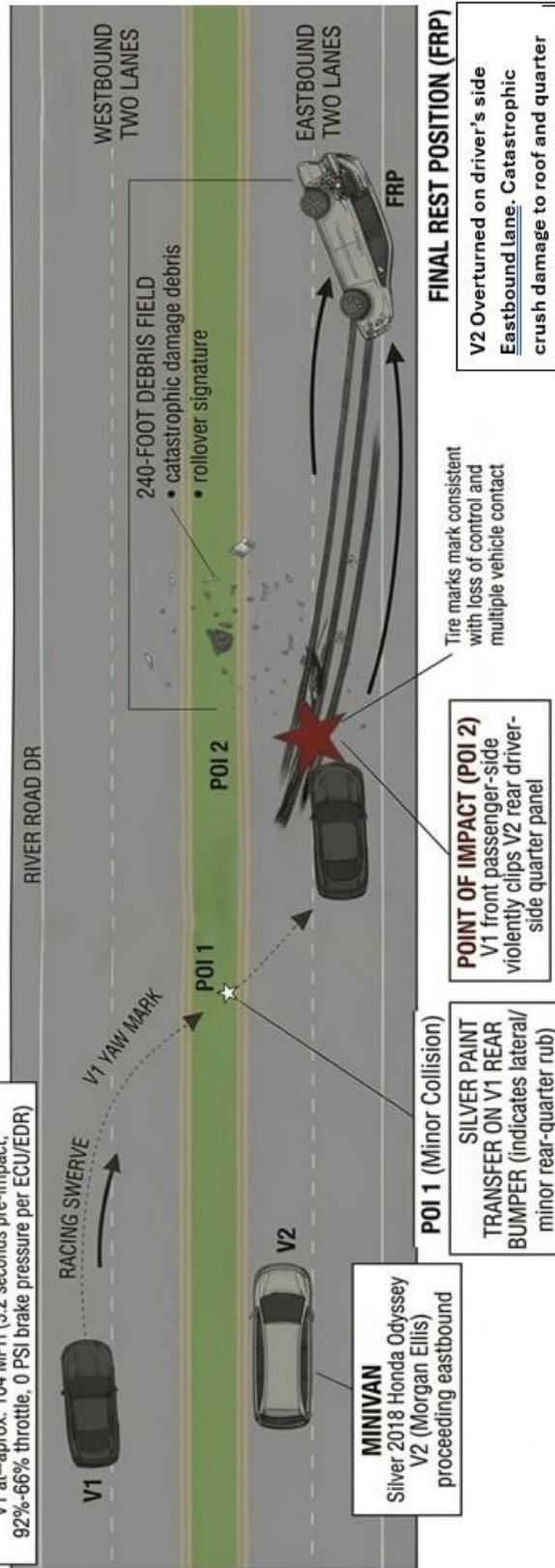


Exhibit #11 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Honda Odyssey Recall

April 9, 2026

NHTSA CAMPAIGN NUMBER: 26V227000 - Air Bags May Deploy Unexpectedly

Air bags that deploy unexpectedly can increase the risk of injury.

NHTSA ID Number: 26V227000

Manufacturer Honda (American Honda Motor Co.)

Components AIR BAGS

Potential Number of Units Affected: 440830

Summary

Honda (American Honda Motor Co.) is recalling certain 2018-2022 Odyssey vehicles. A software programming error can cause the side and side curtain air bags to deploy unexpectedly.

Remedy

Dealers will reprogram the supplemental restraint system (SRS) electronic control module (ECM) software or replace the ECM, as necessary, free of charge. Owner notification letters were mailed May 27, 2026. Owners may contact Honda's customer service at 1-888-234-2138. Honda's identification for this recall is UNW. Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs) involved in this recall will become searchable on NHTSA.gov beginning April 16, 2026. The information in your report suggests that Honda may have been aware of this issue more than five business days before filing a report with NHTSA. Please be reminded that under Federal law, this agency is to be notified of all safety defects and/or noncompliance decisions within five business days. Significant civil penalties can be assessed for this violation.

Exhibit #12 Curriculum Vitae of Casey Miller (Page 1 of 2)

CURRICULUM VITAE

Casey Miller, M.S., P.E.

Principal Forensic Engineer

Miller Automotive Forensic Consulting, LLC

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Licensed Professional Engineer specializing in automotive engineering, forensic vehicle failure analysis, kinetic accident reconstruction, and high-speed vehicle dynamics. Over 14 years of professional engineering experience encompassing manufacturing design, advanced vehicle performance testing, component failure analysis, and forensic expert witness testimony.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Forensic Vehicle Failure Analysis
- Kinetic Accident Reconstruction
- High Speed Vehicle Dynamics
- Electronic Stability Control Systems
- Forensic Tire & Component Failure Analysis
- Physical Crash Test Telemetry Analysis
- Spectrographic & Material Analysis

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Principal Forensic Engineer

Miller Automotive Forensic Consulting, LLC | South Carolina

(2018 – Present)

- Direct independent forensic engineering investigations, crash reconstructions, and vehicle failure analyses for civil and criminal matters.
- Conduct comprehensive physical, mechanical, and microscopic inspections of compromised vehicles, chassis components, and tire/wheel assemblies.
- Utilize advanced analytical equipment, including gas chromatography (HP Model 5710a) and spectrographic analysis, to evaluate material transfer and component failures.
- Personally inspected and analyzed over 350 vehicle failure and high-speed impact cases.
- Retained as an expert witness in automotive engineering and crash dynamics; qualified to testify in state and federal courts on 42 occasions.

Exhibit #12 Curriculum Vitae of Casey Miller (Page 2 of 2)

Senior Vehicle Dynamics Engineer

*BMW Manufacturing Facility & BMW Performance Testing Center Greer, South Carolina
(2011 – 2017)*

- Responsible for designing, testing, and analyzing high-speed vehicle handling characteristics, electronic stability control algorithms, and physical crash-test telemetry.
- Directed the BMW Performance Driving School, developing training curricula to instruct drivers on extreme vehicle handling, skid control, and high-speed collision avoidance.

EDUCATION

Master of Science in Automotive Engineering (2011)

Clemson University – Clemson, South Carolina

- *Graduate Thesis:* "The Effects of Sudden Pneumatic Depressurization on Multi-Link Suspension Stability at High Velocities"

Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering (2008)

Michigan State University – East Lansing, Michigan

LICENSURE & ACCREDITATIONS

- **Licensed Professional Engineer** – State of South Carolina
- **Fully Accredited Traffic Accident Reconstructionist**
- **Certified Component Failure Analyst** – Society of Automotive Engineers
- **Advanced Forensic Tire Failure Analysis Certification** – Monroe Forensic Institute

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Member, Society of Automotive Engineers