



MARYLAND STATE'S ATTORNEYS' ASSOCIATION  
3300 North Ridge Road, Suite 185  
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

David Daggett  
(c) 410.979.3356

O - 410.203.9881

Steven Kroll  
(c) 410.979.3354

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL 29

The Maryland State's Attorneys' Association lends its support to Senate Bill 29, Life – Threatening Injury Involving a Motor Vehicle or Vessel.

As the law currently stands, a person who causes death as the result of driving their vehicle in a "criminally negligent manner" is subject to three years of incarceration and a fine of \$5,000. "Criminally Negligent" driving is defined as "acting in a criminally negligent manner with respect to a result or circumstance when the person should be aware, but fails to perceive, that the person's conduct creates a *substantial and unjustifiable risk* that such a result will occur and the failure to perceive constitutes a *gross deviation* from the standard of care that would be exercised by a reasonable person. It is not a violation if the person drives in a negligent manner. It is not even a violation if the person drives in a reckless manner.

"Negligent Driving" is defined in TR § 21-901.1(b) as "driving a motor vehicle in a *careless or imprudent* manner that endangers any property or the life or person of any individual." Criminal Negligence Resulting in a Life – Threatening Injury, on the other hand, requires a finding beyond a reasonable doubt that the bad driving created a "substantial and unjustifiable risk to human life." Think of Negligent Driving as an act of *nonfeasance* (an act of omission/inattentiveness), while Criminal Negligence could be more properly thought of as an act of *malfeasance* (an overt act that the commission of which is wholly wrongful and unlawful...evil doing...ill conduct.)

Negligent Driving does not carry jail time. The penalty is 1 point (3 points if it contributes to an accident) and a \$500 fine. The pre-payable amounts are \$140 if no accident and \$280 if there is an accident. Clearly, in the situations we are talking about here, there would have been an accident, so 3 points and a \$500 fine (\$280 *pre-payable*) is the maximum penalty. In addition, the at-fault driver can add insult to injury (literally) by not even appearing in court. The guilty party can simply mail a check to the court upon receiving a citation.

The same applies to Reckless Driving, which carries 6 points, a \$510 fine and no incarceration. "Reckless Driving" is defined as driving in a wanton or reckless disregard for the safety of persons or property.

## What is a Life –Threatening Injury?

Definition of Life Threatening Injury - This is the language that is currently used in CR §3-211, Life -Threatening Injury by Motor Vehicle While Under the Influence of Alcohol, et seq. While “life-threatening injury” is not defined by statute, it is clarified in the case of Todd v State, 161 Md. App. 332 (2005), in which the Maryland Court of Special Appeals held:

“The statute that separately criminalized causing a life-threatening injury while driving under the influence of alcohol was neither void for vagueness nor ambiguous despite the absence of a definition for “life threatening injury” as that term could be understood and applied in an everyday sense; therefore, evidence indicating that a child in the car defendant hit head-on suffered a serious head injury that required numerous surgeries at a famous hospital, because they were too complicated to address at the local hospital, were ample to support conviction.”

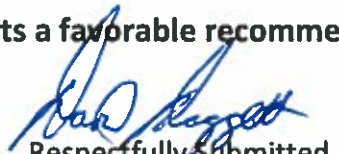
## Difference Between Criminal Negligence and Texting Violations Resulting in Serious Bodily Injury

Criminal Negligence vs. Jake’s Law (TR § 21-1124.3) – A person committing a violation of the texting or cell phone usage sections of the traffic code (TR §§ 21-1124.1 and 1124.2) that causes an accident that directly results in the death or serious bodily injury of another is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 1 year or a fine not exceeding \$5,000 or both. The proposed penalty for Criminal Negligence Resulting in a Life-Threatening Injury is 18 months.

In order to charge Criminal Negligence versus a violation of Jake’s Law, the State must prove *additional evidence of bad driving* over and above texting. Jake’s Law merely requires texting and it must be concomitant inattentiveness due to the texting “that causes” the accident. Criminal Negligence, on the other hand, requires such additional bad driving that rises to a much greater degree of negligence. As previously stated above, it must be shown that the driver should have been aware of – but failed to perceive – that his manner of driving created a substantial and unjustifiable risk to human life and that the failure to perceive that risk was a gross departure from the conduct of a reasonable person under the circumstances. In a case involving texting, in order to take it to the next level of criminal negligence, the driver must be exhibiting other bad behavior, such as significantly speeding, weaving in and out of traffic, tailgating, running a red light or stop sign, etc.

## Conclusion

It is extremely hard to explain to a victim – or to the family of a victim – that had they or their loved one been killed in a crash caused by a criminally negligent defendant, the at-fault driver would have been facing jail time and a significant fine, but because the victim may have “only” been maimed or paralyzed (but lived), the at-fault driver merely faces points on their driving record and a fine amounting to a pittance. **It is for the reasons stated above that the Maryland State’s Attorneys’ Association supports a favorable recommendation of Senate Bill 29.**

  
Respectfully Submitted,  
David Daggett, MDSAA

SERIOUS PHYSICAL INJURY DEFINED

CR 3-201(d)

- i. creates a substantial risk of death
- ii. creates permanent or protracted serious:
  - disfigurement
  - loss of the function of any bodily member or organ;
  - impairment of the function of any bodily member or organ

SERIOUS BODILY INJURY DEFINED

TR 27-113

- i. creates a substantial risk of death
- ii. causes serious permanent or serious protracted disfigurement
- iii causes serious permanent or serious protracted loss of the function of any bodily part, organ or mental faculty or
- iv causes serious permanent or serious protracted impairment of the function of any bodily member or organ

LIFE THREATENING INJURY DEFINED

Todd v State, 161 Md. App. 332 (2005)

"Statute that separately criminalized causing a life-threatening injury while driving under the influence of alcohol was neither void for vagueness nor ambiguous despite the absence of a definition for "life threatening injury" as that term could be understood and applied in an everyday sense; therefore, evidence indicating that a child in the car defendant hit head-on suffered a serious head injury that required numerous surgeries at a famous hospital, because they were too complicated to address at the local hospital, were ample to support conviction."

On Monday, June 18, 2018 at approximately 10:50 p.m. at the northbound 78 mile marker of the JFK Memorial Highway (I 95), in Harford County, Maryland, construction was taking place that required traffic to be funneled down from three lanes to one. A number of signs were posted beginning about a mile south of the crash scene. Lanes one (the fast lane) and two (middle) were merging into the far right (slow) lane of travel. The speed limit at that location was 65 MPH. The weather was clear and dry and traffic was fairly heavy.

A Volvo tractor-trailer pulling a white Great Dane semitrailer with appx. 45,000 pounds (22.5 tons) of shingles, had been hauled up from Greensboro, North Carolina, beginning at about 10:30 that morning by a single driver, who was the sole occupant of the tractor-trailer. While the driver was not in violation of any commercial vehicle regulations, he had been on the journey for slightly over 12 hours and though he had made a number of stops along the way, his driving logs indicated that he had not taken any *sleep* breaks.

Prior to impact, as other vehicles were either slowing or coming to a complete halt, the tractor-trailer continued travelling at close to 60 MPH, making no effort to slow down. The tractor-trailer then plowed into the queue, causing a chain reaction of destruction.

The first vehicle struck was a 2010 Toyota Camry with New Jersey registration. The Camry was being driven by **Ms. Carla Ortiz**. Her daughter **Je'ani ("Gee ah nee") Lyles** (13 y.o. at the time of the crash) was in the right front seat. Carla Ortiz was in the far right hand lane travelling at stop and go speed when "she felt a bomb go off and her vehicle was struck from behind." She did not hear any noises of pre-impact braking nor the sounds of horns to warn her about the potential crash. After being struck, her car was pushed forward by the tractor-trailer at a high rate of speed, causing her to impact with other vehicles.

Je'ani was transported to John's Hopkins Pediatric Hospital and she suffered a severing of her T8 vertebrae. She continues to be paralyzed from the chest down to this day.

After the initial collision, the Volvo truck "overrode" the Camry's bumper and effectively became interlocked, becoming one unit. The Camry and tractor-trailer then continued forward at a high rate of speed, with the truck then striking a Honda Civic. The Civic was stationary and was being operated by **Paul Manion**. His wife **Angela** was the front seat passenger and their daughter, **Morgan Rose Manion** (14 y.o.a.) was in the left rear passenger seat. The Manions were in the far right lane preparing to exit the highway and they had noticed the bright yellow signs going back some distance. They had been stopped for 2-3 seconds when they felt a crash and multiple occurring hits, as the truck side-swiped the Civic. The Civic then flipped and Paul, Angela and Rose were hanging upside down from their seat belts. They never heard the sound of any brakes or horns nor did they see the truck approaching from the rear.

Rose Manion was transported by air to the Johns Hopkins Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, suffering from extensive injuries. On Wednesday, June 22 at approximately 8:20 p.m., 14 year old Rose succumbed to her injuries.

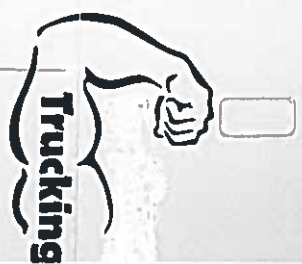
While the defendant was found guilty of Criminally Negligent Homicide for the death of Morgan Manion, the lack of Criminal Negligence Resulting in Life-Threatening Injury severely limited the charging options related to the injuries suffered by Je'Ani, other than a payable offense.





Operated By  
Greensboro, NC  
USDOT 36  
MC 34201

336-707-1543  
336-501-8473



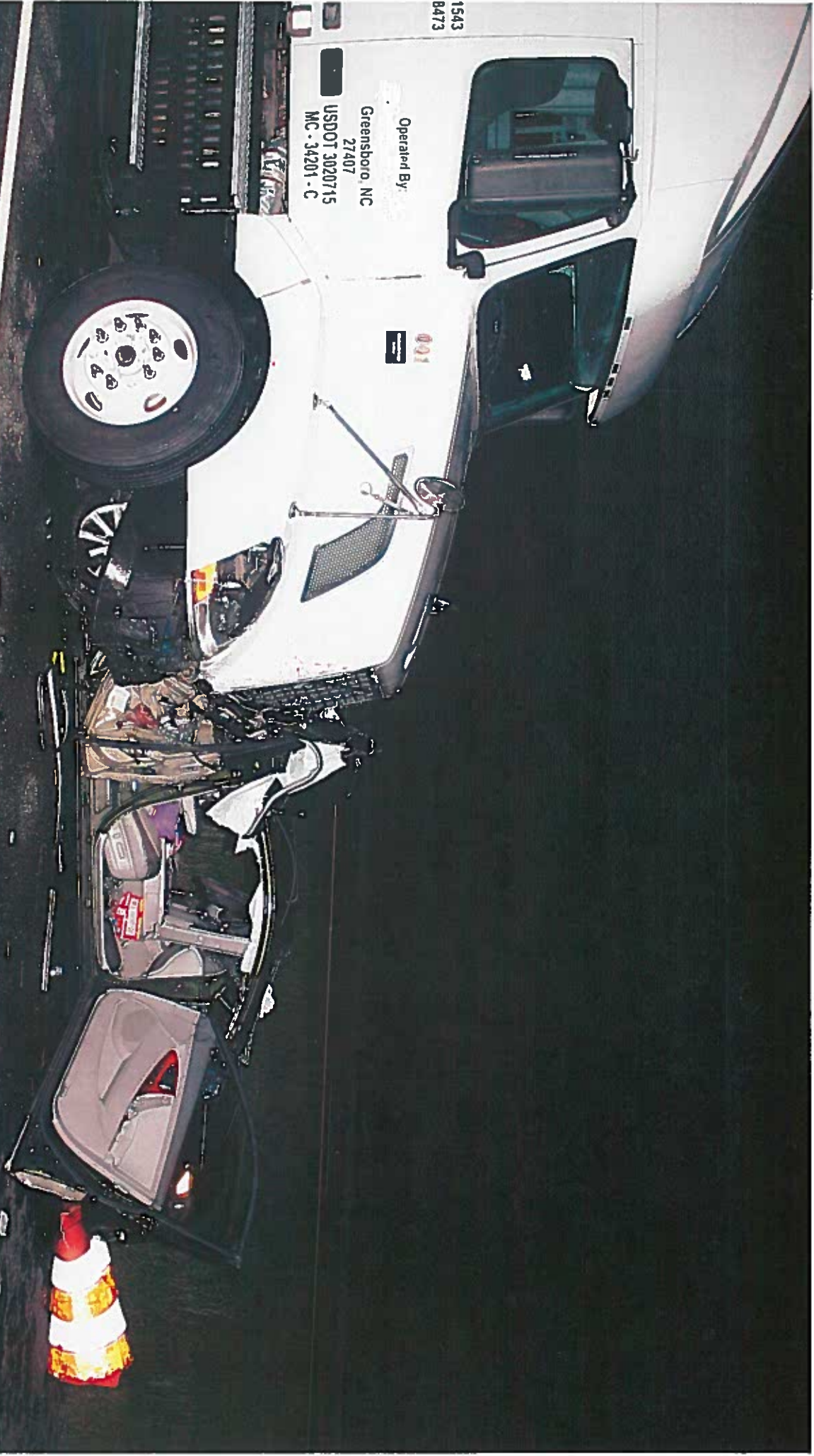
"Keep On Truckin"

ONLY



1543  
8473

Operated By:  
Greensboro, NC  
27407  
USDOT 3020715  
MC - 34201 - C







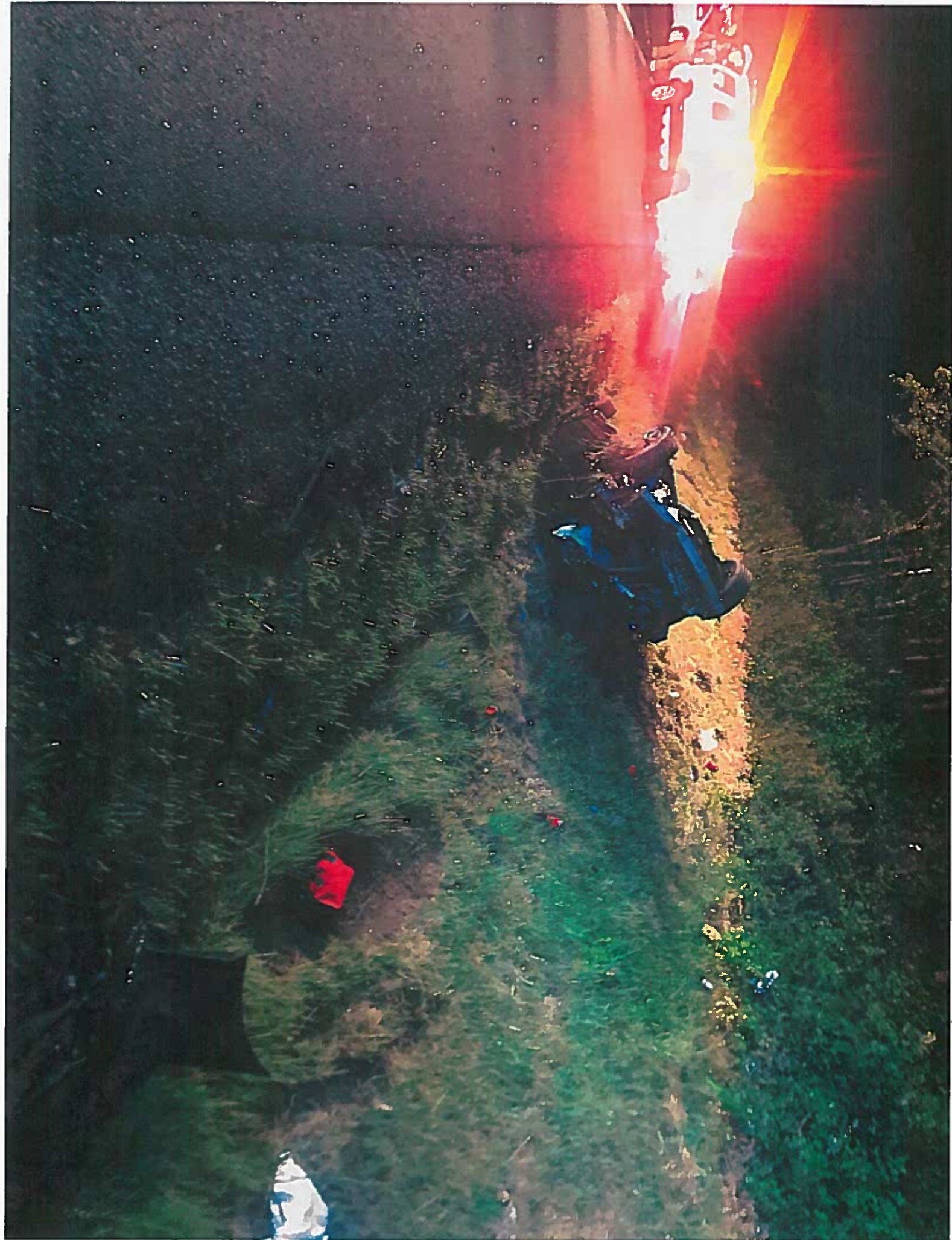




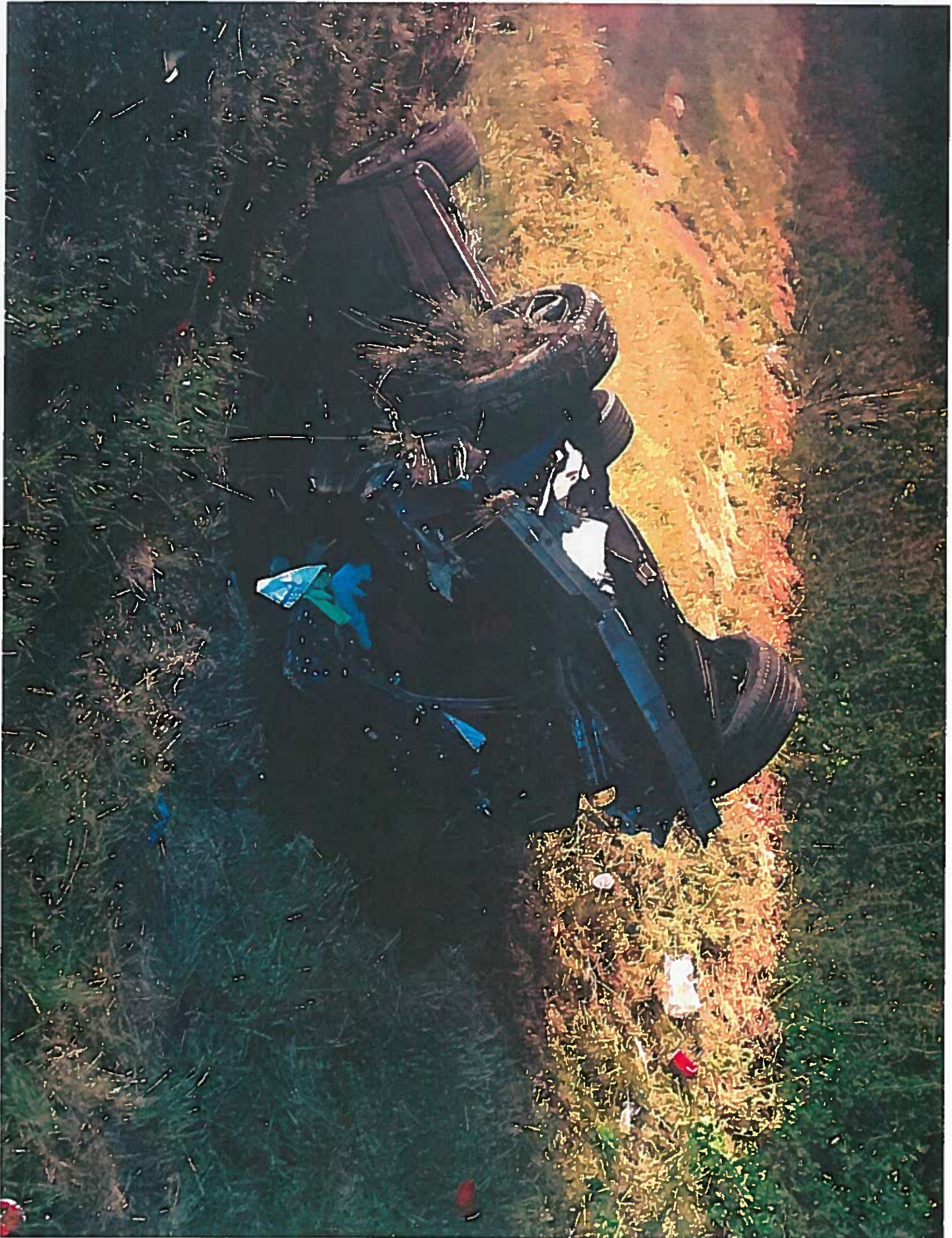




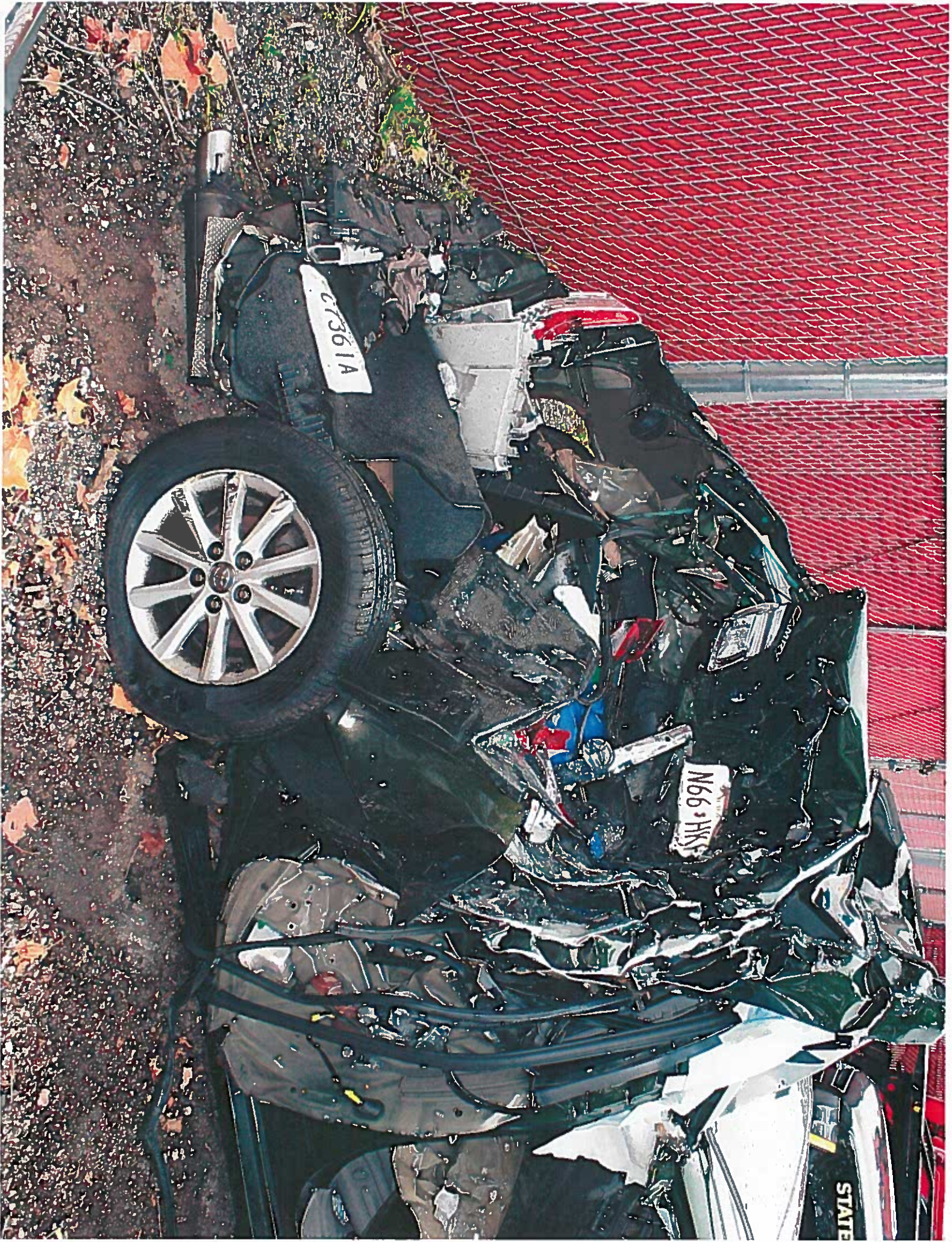








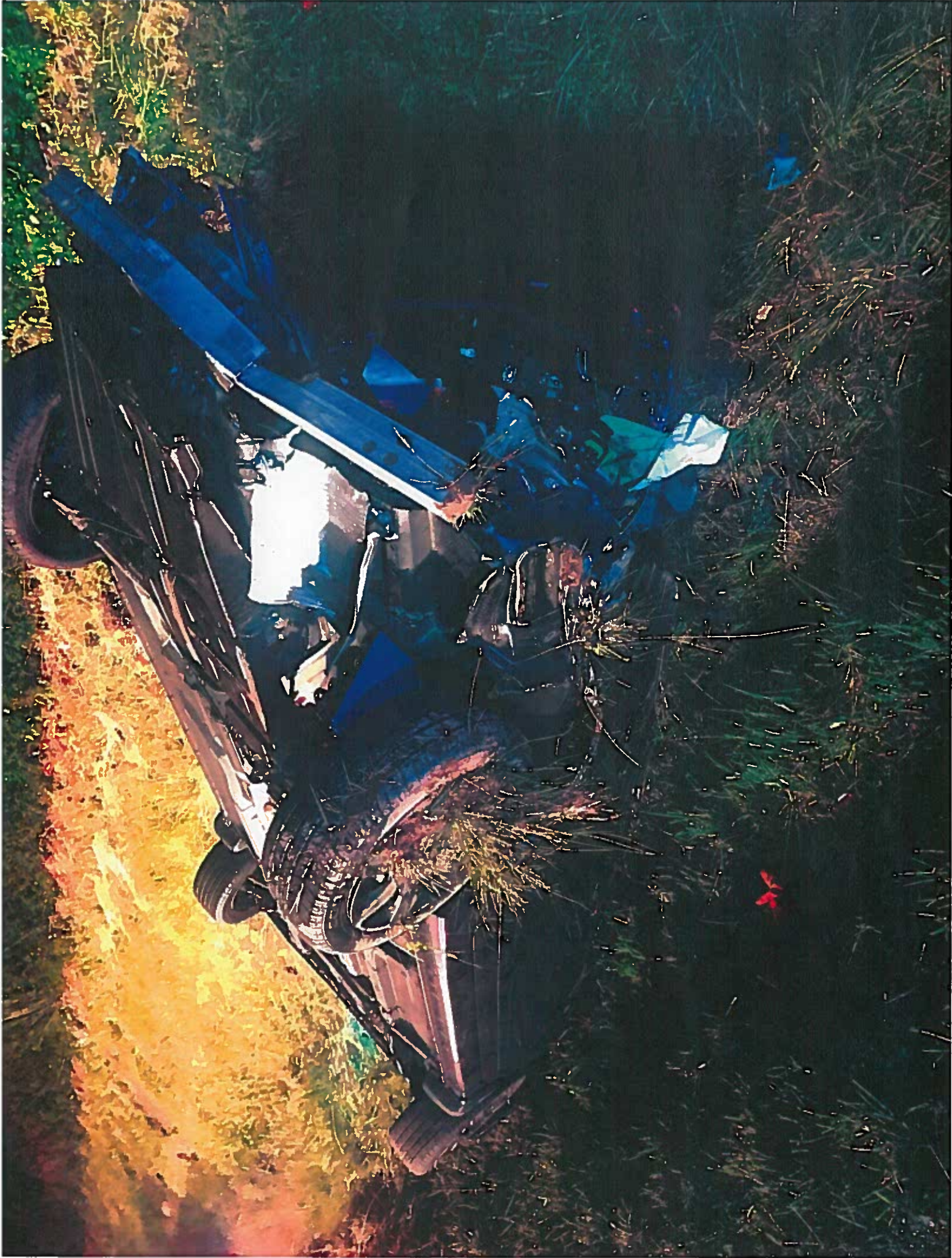




















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