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# \$1m award upheld for ex-trooper hurt on I-95

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HARTFORD — The state Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld a \$1 million award to a former State Police trooper who was injured while responding to an accident in Westport nearly 14 years ago.

The state's appeal court ruled that former Trooper Michelle Pondi-Salik is entitled to the award totaling \$1,026,025, in addition to her retirement benefits.

The state's insurance carrier, Travelers Insurance Co., had contested the award, claiming that it should be deducted from Pondi-Salik's disability retirement funds.

"It was a fair and appropriate result for a devoted state trooper who was severely injured in the line of duty," said her lawyer, Harold L. Rosnick of Bridgeport.

Pondi-Salik was injured Aug. 30, 1989, as she responded to a two-car accident on the northbound side of Interstate 95 near exit 17 in Westport, according to a police report on the incident.

She had pulled over onto the shoulder of the highway when her cruiser was hit from behind by a truck driven by Max Spiegel of Bridgeport.

The impact buckled the rear of the police cruiser and pushed it forward about 70 feet.

Spiegel was charged with reckless driving and failure to have insurance.

Pondi-Salik, then 27, was taken to Norwalk Hospital, where she had surgery on her lower back and remained for 20 days.

"Because of her injury, she was just not capable of working as a state trooper," he said, adding that she was out of work 15 months and eventually retired in January 1991.

Because Spiegel did not have insurance, Pondi-Salik sought compensation from the state police insurance carrier's uninsured motorist policy.

The claim was later submitted to an arbitration panel, which ruled in her favor in October 2000.

Travelers filed an appeal in Superior Court, but a judge upheld the award. Travelers then appealed to the Supreme Court.