Injured woman sues state, trooper after cruiser crash

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BRENTWOOD — An Exeter woman is suing the state of New Hampshire and a state trooper after she was injured in a crash with a police cruiser in Epping.

A. Rhoda Cohen recently filed suit against the state Department of Safety, Commissioner John J. Barthelmes, and Trooper Christopher Prenaveau over the 2015 accident that she claims caused serious permanent physical injuries.

The suit, filed in Rockingham County Superior Court through Plaistow attorney Sumner Kalman, accuses Prenaveau of negligence by “failing to use reasonable care under the circumstances by changing lanes in front of the plaintiff’s vehicle when it was not safe to do so.”

According to the accident report obtained by the New Hampshire Union Leader, Prenaveau, 44, was traveling north on Route 125 in the right lane and was preparing to turn right onto Coffin Road.

Cohen was a passenger in her 2010 Mercedes and was headed north in the center lane when Prenaveau merged left into the center lane and into Cohen’s path, the report said. The Mercedes then struck the front left quarter of the cruiser, the report said.

Prenaveau told state police investigators that while preparing to turn right onto Coffin Road he saw another vehicle in the left lane make an illegal U-turn. The report said Prenaveau stated that he activated his emergency lights and “after looking, he attempted to merge to the left into the center lane.”

Prenaveau stated that he didn’t see Cohen’s vehicle, and as he merged the vehicle hit the cruiser.

The driver of Cohen’s vehicle, Thomas Weisshaus, told police he was traveling north on Route 125 when the cruiser struck his vehicle, according to the report.

Prenaveau wasn’t injured. Cohen and Weisshaus were sent to Exeter Hospital. Weisshaus was released while Cohen suffered a fractured 5th vertebrae, the report said. The investigation found Prenaveau caused the accident when he changed lanes in front of the other vehicle “when it was not safe to do so,” the report said.

The suit seeks damages for the injuries, which caused Cohen to endure “long medical care and treatment” and resulted in medical bills.

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