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State Will Pay \$1.8 Million to Man Injured in Crash of Passenger Van

New Jersey has agreed to pay \$1.8 million to a man injured while a passenger in a state vehicle.

On May 9, 2006, Juan Molina, 17, of Elizabeth, was returning from a fishing outing for people with disabilities when the van's driver lost control on the Garden State Parkway in Clifton, causing the van to plum-

met down an embankment.

Molina was thrown from the vehicle and suffered a cervical fracture dislocation that required fusion, a lumbar fracture and brain injuries that worsened his cognitive abilities, says his lawyer, **Todd Leonard** of **Leonard & Leonard** in Morristown.

Leonard, assisted in the case by

partner **Alvin Leonard**, says a police investigation blamed driver error for the crash.

Under the Dec. 11 stipulation of settlement filed in Passaic County, the plaintiff's mother, Carmen Echevarria, received \$150,000 of the total on her per quod claim in the case, *Molina v. State of New Jersey*.

Leonard says the defense stipulated to liability but that Deputy Attorney General **Alfred Low-Beer** obtained an expert opinion that the plaintiff made an excellent recovery and that the accident did not cause further cognitive defects.

Leland Moore, a spokesman for the state Attorney General's Office, says the settlement was a fair and reasonable outcome.

— By Henry Gottlieb

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