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California family settles lawsuit over leaked crash images

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By [Dan Whitcomb](#)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - The family of a teen whose mangled corpse was shown in horrific car-crash photos that went viral online has settled a lawsuit against the California Highway Patrol for \$2.37 million, ending a 5-year legal battle that changed state law.

The extremely graphic pictures, taken by investigators and leaked by two dispatchers, were posted across the Internet and used to taunt family members of 18-year-old Nicole "Nikki" Catsouras following her 2006 crash on an Orange County highway.

The settlement was made public by the highway patrol and an attorney for Catsouras's parents and three sisters on Tuesday as a March trial date loomed in the long-running case.

"No amount of money can compensate for the pain the Catsouras family has suffered," California Highway Patrol spokeswoman Fran Clader said in a statement.

"We have reached a resolution with the family to save substantial costs of continued litigation and a jury trial," Clader said. "It is our hope that with this legal issue resolved the Catsouras family can receive some closure."

Nikki Catsouras was driving her father's Porsche 911 at more than 100 miles per hour on Halloween night in 2006 when she lost control of the sports car and slammed into a toll booth. She was killed instantly.

Plaintiff's attorney Keith Bremer said the crash scene photos were taken by highway patrol investigators for legitimate purposes but then inappropriately sent to other officers and the dispatchers before ultimately finding their way onto the web.

"Rather than be able mourn and grieve their loss, the family was met every single day with a reminder not only that their daughter died, but the horrific fashion in which she died," he said.

A 2010 state appeals court ruling found that the Catsouras family had standing to sue for invasion of privacy on the 18-year-old's behalf, establishing new precedent under California law that has since been followed elsewhere.

"The family is pleased it established laws the protect against this type of activity going forward and has raised significant awareness concerning cyber bullying," Bremer said.

"The family continues to remember and celebrate the great memories and life of Nicole. We are hopeful that the closure of this subsequent cyber-event will help the entire family to move forward and heal," he said.

Lawyers for the family were still fighting to have the photos removed from the Internet after more than five years, Bremer said, with some websites refusing to take them down despite threats of legal action.

As part of the settlement, the highway patrol has agreed to assist in those efforts, he said. Bremer said one of the dispatchers has since left the highway patrol and the other was disciplined.

(Reporting by Dan Whitcomb; Editing by Cynthia Johnston)

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