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Police officer's widow agrees to a settlement

By Thomas J. Gibbons Jr.

A Philadelphia policewoman struck him with a cruiser as she came to his aid. Terms of the offer were not disclosed.

The City of Philadelphia has agreed to pay an undisclosed amount of money to the widow of Police Officer Jose M. Ortiz, who died last month after a patrol car hit him as he ran after a suspect, the widow's lawyer said yesterday.

Although the out-of-court settlement will not become record until the papers are signed attorney A. Charles Peruto Jr. said that Ortiz's widow, Theresa McMahon, had accepted the terms.

"Now it's an agreement," Peruto said.

City Solicitor Kenneth Trujillo, who met with Peruto for more than an hour Monday, would confirm only that a meeting occurred on a possible settlement.

"We had good discussions, and we think that we can get this matter resolved shortly. But until an agreement is signed, no deal is final" Trujillo said.

The meeting was at Trujillo's offices in the 1500 block of Arch Street, McMahon did not attend, Peruto said.

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"Basically, they felt my demands were reasonable.

"They [lawyers for the city] huddled for about 10 minutes, and they said, "OK." The city wasn't out to fight me on anything." Peruto said. "They made that clear from the beginning."

According to Trujillo, when a settlement is final, a monetary figure will be made public.

Ortiz, who was 29 and assigned to plainclothes duty in the 25th District in east Philadelphia, died Sept. 21 at Temple University Hospital, three days after he was struck by the cruiser whose driver was rushing to assist him as he ran after a suspect in the Fairhill section of North Philadelphia.

That officer, Tina Hudrick, 34, had four accidents in patrol vehicles since graduating from the Police Academy less than three years ago. Police officials ruled three of the accidents preventable.

According to Peruto, Hudrick's driving record could have been grounds for a lawsuit. "When I first got the case and heard about this, we were loaded for bear, ready to go in and start taking heads off," he said.

"After I became intimately involved in the case ...it became clear to me that this [Hudrick] was a woman who was suffering, and suffering badly. The city was between a rock and a hard place with two of their own, and they did not want it to get ugly. They really wanted to do the right thing for both police officers" Ortiz and McMahon have a 3-year-old daughter, Nicole.