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## Illinois Trooper Pleads Not Guilty to Crash Charge

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Mar. 20--BELLEVILLE -- Illinois State Police Trooper Matt Mitchell pleaded not guilty to two counts of reckless homicide and two counts of reckless driving against him this morning.

Mitchell, who suffered severe leg injuries in the Nov. 23 highway crash that killed two Collinsville sisters, showed up for the hearing in a wheelchair. He appeared before St. Clair County Circuit Judge Stephen Rice, who also set a \$30,000 personal recognizance bond for Mitchell.

The hearing lasted five minutes. Mitchell was represented by Belleville attorney John O'Gara, who entered the not guilty pleas on behalf Mitchell. A trial date has not been set in the case.

Assistant State's Attorney Justin Hood told Rice he agreed with the request to allow Mitchell to remain free on a personal recognizance bond.

"We don't think the defendant is a flight risk," Hood said.

If convicted on each of the four counts, Mitchell could be sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison on each of the reckless homicide charges, and up to three years on each of the reckless driving charges -- total of 16 years.

The state's case against Mitchell rests on an Illinois State Police internal affairs investigation of the events leading to the Nov. 23 highway cross-over crash that killed Jessica Uhl, 18, and her sister Kelli, 13, both of Collinsville.

State police investigators interviewed more than 70 witnesses. O'Gara said he plans to re-interview each of them.

"Every one and then some," O'Gara said.

Mitchell "is of, course, devastated and heartsick about the loss of any life, especially two young, wonderful girls," O'Gara said.

A special grand jury found that Mitchell, 29, was driving his 2006 Impala squad car 126 mph in busy, day-after Thanksgiving traffic while engaged in "other activities," when it crossed the median of Interstate 64 and struck a vehicle carrying the Uhl sisters.

Last Friday, the grand jury indicted Mitchell on two charges of reckless homicide in the deaths of the Uhl sisters, plus two counts of aggravated reckless driving for injuries inflicted on two other motorists -- Kelly Marler and his pregnant wife, Christine Marler, of Fayetteville.

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