

CASE NO. _____

**PAUL RIEHM, ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ESTATE
OF LORRI J. RIEHM, DECEASED,
Plaintiff-Appellant,**

-vs-

**GREEN SPRINGS RURAL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT;
SETH T. KNIERIEMEN
Defendant-Appellees.**

**ON APPEAL FROM THE THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT
SENECA COUNTY, OHIO
CASE NO. 13-18-15**

**MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF JURISDICTION
OF PLAINTIFF-APPELLANT, PAUL L. RIEHM,
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ESTATE OF LORRI J. RIEHM, DECEASED**

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**STATEMENT OF WHY THIS CASE PRESENTS ISSUES OF PUBLIC AND GREAT
GENERAL IMPORTANCE**

This appeal arises out of the tragic death of Lorri Riehm (“Decedent”) on June 28, 2016, at the Beaver Creek Reservoir. She had been exercising by walking around the perimeter pathway when she stopped briefly for a break. Without warning, Defendant-Appellee, Seth Knieriemen (“Knieriemen”), started a Ford F-350 Super Duty 4X4 Pick-Up Truck and backed over the Decedent while she was facing the other direction. Knieriemen had been working at the time in the course of his employment with Defendant-Appellee, Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department (“GSFD”).

The First Proposition of Law presents an issue of public and great general importance that is already being considered by this Court in a closely related setting. *McConnell v. Dudley*, Sup. Ct. Case No. 2018-0377. The central question presented in the pending *McConnell* appeal is whether a political subdivision’s allegedly negligent training and instruction of a rookie police officer prior to the commencement of an emergency call must be evaluated under the “willful or wanton” standard set forth in R.C. 2744.02(B)(1)(a).¹ The instant appeal raises the same issue but in the context of the “emergency alarm” exception to liability provided for firefighting departments and agencies in R.C. 2744.02(B)(1)(b). As in *McConnell*, the primary contention will be that while GSFD had been responding to a dispatch that a boat had capsized in the reservoir, the boaters had been rescued and the circumstances were neither urgent nor pressing when Knieriemen backed the pick-up truck over the Decedent. The instant appeal is thus

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¹ The Proposition of Law that was accepted by this Court in *McConnell* states:

A Political Subdivision is immune from liability for allegations of negligent hiring, or failure to train or supervise police officers, as such allegations do not fall within any of the exceptions found within R.C. 2744.02(B)(1) through (B)(5).

McConnell v. Dudley, 153 Ohio St.3d 1451, 2018-Ohio-3026, 103 N.E.3d 830 (Table).

a perfect companion for *McConnell*, given that the two cases present the same ultimate question but in connection with two different subsections of R.C. 2744.02(B)(1).

As was undoubtedly appreciated when *McConnell* was accepted for review, the proper scope of the “emergency call” and “emergency alarm” exceptions to political subdivision liability is a significant issue that Ohio courts are routinely required to analyze and apply. In both cases, the lower appellate courts have simply assumed that once such exigent circumstances commence, the heightened willful and wanton standard applies to all of the municipality’s tortious acts or omissions regardless of when they occur. As a result, no liability can be imposed for negligence committed either before or after the emergency call/alarm has actually taken place.

There will be no shortage of absurd circumstances that will be produced by this nonsensical interpretation of R.C. 2744.02(B)(1). For example, if a city mechanic carelessly installed the wrong brake parts in a police cruiser, proof would be required that he did so willfully or wantonly if a police officer was unable to stop the vehicle and struck a pedestrian while chasing a fleeing felon. Likewise, a fireman who negligently drove a truck through a red light and caused a collision while returning to the station after putting out a fire would be entitled to immunity against his negligence. But in both scenarios, negligence would be sufficient to establish liability for the same accidents if the vehicles were being operated as part of routine duties without an emergency call or alarm.

This Court should take this opportunity to confirm that the “emergency alarm” exception provided in R.C. 2744.02(B)(1)(b), like the “emergency call” exception appearing in R.C. 2744.02(B)(1)(a), applies only to the course of the exigent circumstances and no further. This sensible construction not only comports with the plain and ordinary meaning of the governing terms, but avoids absurd and unintended consequences.

The second Proposition of Law raises the related question of whether the test for recklessness that applies to claims for individual employee liability requires the same

degree of dereliction as is the case for willful and wanton misconduct. *R.C. 2744.032(A)(6)(b)*. In overturning the common pleas court's denial of summary judgment upon the political subdivision immunity defense, a divided panel of the Third District concluded that no reasonable juror could find against Defendant Knieriemen in this regard strictly on the grounds that a "failure to follow standard operating guidelines does not establish a genuine of material fact as to whether there was more than negligence here, particularly where he did not see, and perhaps could not have seen," the Decedent. *Apx. 00021, ¶56*. As will be developed in the remainder of this Memorandum, substantial evidence had been submitted below confirming that Knieriemen had afforded no concern at all for anyone who happened to be standing behind his truck even though the rescue had been completed and he possessed ample time to ensure that no one was in danger. The only "proof" to the contrary has been furnished by Knieriemen himself, which a jury could reject as both implausible and self-serving. This aspect of the Third District majority's opinion thus establishes a dangerous precedent, which merit this Court's time and attention.

Significant issues of public and great general importance are thus at stake in this appeal.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

The instant Complaint was filed in the Seneca County Common Pleas Court on December 13, 2016, against Defendants GSFD and Knieriemen. Separate claims were raised for Wrongful Death and Survivorship. Answers were submitted denying liability and interposing various affirmative defenses, including an assertion of entitlement of qualified immunity under R.C. Chapter 2744.

On January 18, 2018, a Motion for Summary Judgment was filed on behalf of Defendant GSFD. A similar Rule 56 motion was submitted by Defendant Knieriemen at the same time. Both motions were founded upon Defendants' claims that they have a statutory right to "enjoy absolute immunity." Additionally, Defendants sought judgment

upon Plaintiff's claim of conscious pain and suffering. On February 20, 2018, Plaintiff timely filed a Consolidated Response in Opposition to the motions. Plaintiff's memorandum, along with the evidentiary materials submitted to the Court, established that disputed issues of fact existed with regard to each of the immunity defenses that had been raised as well as with regard to Plaintiff's survival claim.

On April 20, 2018, the trial court issued an Order denying each of the Motions for Summary Judgment on all counts. *Apx. 00028, attached.* GSFD and Knieriemen responded with a Notice of Appeal on May 7, 2018. In a divided decision, the Third Judicial District reversed the common pleas judge on October 9, 2018. *Id., 0001.* The majority concluded that Plaintiff was required to prove willful and wanton misconduct even though the boaters had been rescued and the emergency alarm was over before Knieriemen backed the pick-up truck over the Decedent. *Id., 00012-20, ¶ 32-55.* They further determined that no reasonable juror could possibly find that Knieriemen had recklessly operated the vehicle. *Id., ¶ 56.* Judge Zimmerman disagreed with both holdings and would have affirmed the common pleas court. *Id., 00022-25, ¶ 60-64.*

Plaintiff responded with a Motion for Reconsideration on October 22, 2018, which Defendants opposed. The request was summarily denied in a Journal Entry that was issued on November 8, 2018. *Apx. 00026.*

STATEMENT OF THE FACTS

The following facts were established during the summary judgment proceedings below.

A. THE DEPARTMENT'S MANDATORY SAFETY RULES

GSFD is a non-profit corporation operating as a "private fire company" providing fire services, but no emergency medical services. *DE 40, Lowe Dep. 12; DE 44, Carter Dep. 45.* GSFD adopted Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs). *DE 69, Opp to MSJ Ex A, GS-000066.* The SOGs set forth GSFD's Statement of Policy, which expressly provides, "It is this organization's requirement that all safety rules be strictly observed at all times"

and that “if a safety rule has been omitted or overlooked, it does not excuse carelessness or lack of common sense in the performance of job duties.” *Id. at GS-000071.* “[D]isregard for rules is a violation of [GSFD’s] policy”. *Id.*

GSFD members are required to execute an acknowledgment that they have “read and understand” the SOGs and agree that they “will abide by [the SOGs].” *Id. at GS-000026; DE 40, Lowe Dep. 29.* Seth Knieriemen executed the SOGs, expressly agreeing to abide by them. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 65.*

B. KNIERIEMEN’S DISREGARD FOR TRAINING AND SAFETY

Knieriemen has been a continuous member of GSFD since 2007. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 27.* During his tenure, Knieriemen had an admitted history of disregard for GSFD’s training requirements, safety standards, and rules. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, p.6.* For instance, although he expressly executed an acknowledgment of receipt and review of GSFD’s SOGs, and agreed to “abide” by them, he had actually admitted he had never fully read them until after the lawsuit. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 38-39.* He dismissed everything in the SOGs as “suggestions” that he did not need to follow, even when it said the rules shall be strictly followed and were for the safety of others. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 39, 44.*

GSFD mandates that all of its firefighters obtain 20 hours of qualifying training each calendar year. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Exhibit A, p. GS-000061.* If a GSFD firefighter fails to meet annual training requirements, they are sent a letter indicating they are no longer a member in good standing and are given 30 days to correct the deficiency. *DE 40, Lowe Dep. 11-12.* If they fail to comply, they are to be removed from active service. *Id. at 51.* Chief Lowe testified that Knieriemen repeatedly failed to meet annual training requirements, despite being “talked” to about it. *Id. at 52.*

C. REPORT OF INCIDENT AT THE BEAVER CREEK RESERVOIR

Beaver Creek is a large above ground reservoir located in Adams Township, Seneca County, Ohio. *DE 2, Pltf. Cmplt., ¶ 7.* The reservoir is owned and controlled by the City

of Clyde. *Id. at ¶ 8, Clyde Ord. 955.03.* It is a designated and well-known public recreational area. *DE 2, Pltf. Cmplt., ¶ 8-9.* The reservoir has a walking trail located around the top of its embankment that is used by runners, walkers, and people fishing. *DE 2, Pltf. Cmplt., ¶ 9; DE 60, Overmeyer Dep. 12.* The reservoir has a parking area and a place to launch boats, but is otherwise entirely closed off to vehicular traffic. *Clyde Ord. 955.05; DE 44, Carter Dep. 63.*

On June 28, 2016, Charles Musser and his friend Gary Overmyer decided to go fishing together at the Beaver Creek Reservoir. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 7.* Gary hauled his 12' aluminum boat to the reservoir in the late afternoon or early evening, launched the boat, and began fishing. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 8-9; DE 60, Overmeyer Dep. 7.* It was a warm, summer day and there were a lot of people out at the reservoir walking and boating. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 10-11.*

Gary does not exactly recall what happened, other than at some point he leaned and his chair broke. *DE 60, Overmeyer Dep. 9.* His sudden shift in weight caused him to fall into the water, tip the boat, and send Charles in too. *DE 60, Overmeyer Dep. 9; DE 48, Musser Dep. 10.* The boat did not entirely capsize, but it took on some water. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 11.* They put on their life vests, grabbed the side of the boat, and swam while pushing the boat ashore. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 12; DE 60, Overmeyer Dep. 10.* Another fishing boat approached them asking if they were ok or needed help, but they initially declined because the shore was nearby. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 13-14; DE 60, Overmeyer Dep. 10-11.* The boaters, Brad Jett and Tyler Carpenter, persisted with their offer. *DE 58, Jett Dep. 9; DE 54, Carpenter Dep. 9; DE 48, Musser Dep. 13; DE 60, Overmeyer Dep. 10-11.* The boaters tied a rope to Gary's boat and began to tow them to the nearby shore. *DE 58, Jett Dep. 9.*

D. GREEN SPRINGS IS ALERTED AND PROCEEDS TO THE RESERVOIR

At 8:04 p.m. on June 26, 2016, a page went out advising Republic EMS and Green Springs of a capsized boat at the reservoir. *DE 67, Lowe Aff., Ex. B.* Specifically, the page

advised that boaters had life vests on and it was not certain that they needed attention. *Id.* The page further advised that the Seneca County Water Rescue Team had already been dispatched. *Id; DE 44, Carter Dep. 44-45; DE 40, Lowe Dep. 69.* Seneca County Water Rescue is specially trained in water rescue. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 44.* GSFD testified that it does not have a specific water rescue team. *Id. at 39.*

Knieriemen was home when he received the page. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 51.* He testified that he was free to ignore the call but decided to respond. *Id. at 53.*

While at the station, Knieriemen got the GSFD boat and hooked it up to Unit 14, a Ford F-350 pick-up truck (“Brush Truck”). *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 59-60.* Another firefighter drove Knieriemen and others to the reservoir in the Brush Truck. *Id. at 59.* In all, GSFD responded with 19 firefighters, one junior member, a Brush Truck, two Fire Engines, a Tanker, and their boat. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Ex. A, GS-000002; DE 40, Lowe Dep. 77.* Seneca County Water Rescue dispatched two units, Republic EMS dispatched a unit, and the Seneca County Sheriff’s Department dispatched two units. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Ex. A, GS-000001.*

When they arrived, the team found the capsized boaters in the reservoir. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 54.* GSFD members knew before they responded that the boaters were in life jackets and another boat on the reservoir was already providing assistance. *Id.* GSFD nonetheless launched their boat. Firefighters Nic Frey and Mike Carter coasted across the reservoir in the boat to where the intended rescuees were located with a plan to help the gentlemen into the boat and return with them to the front of the reservoir. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 54; DE 52, Frey Dep. 25, 29.* Shortly after they took off, they ran out of fuel. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 55.*

Chief Lowe testified that since his team got to the scene first and got their boat in the water, he decided to cancel the water rescue team, despite the fact that they ran out of fuel. *DE 40, Lowe Dep. 69-70.* The GSFD boat crew, being out of fuel, began to “oar” their way to the boaters. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 56.*

With the assistance of the boaters, Charles and Gary had made considerable headway and were maybe 20 yards from the bank when the GSFD boat approached. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 14.* However, rather than permit the gentlemen to continue on their way, GSFD told them to stay put and they would paddle over in a bit. *DE 54, Carpenter Dep. 14.* It took GSFD about five minutes to scull to the men. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 56.* Indicative of whether the current situation was viewed as an “emergency,” GSFD testified that at the time, the delay caused by running out of fuel was viewed as inconsequential. *DE 40, Lowe Dep. 65.*

Meanwhile, understanding that the boat was out of fuel, Lieutenant Chris Stickles asked Chief Lowe if he could drive the Brush Truck up on the embankment and take fuel back to the GSFD boat. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 22.* Chief Lowe agreed and directed Knieriemen to get the can of fuel from one of the trucks. *Id. at 67.* Knieriemen did so and climbed on the back of the Brush Truck with Luke Cantu. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 68; DE 50, Cantu Dep. 25.* Chris Stickles drove the Brush Truck. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 80.* They understood that they were taking the truck “for refueling purposes,” not to pick up the capsized gentlemen. *Id. at 112.* There were several pedestrians walking on the embankment of the reservoir, including the Decedent. *See DE 58, Jett Dep. 8; DE 56, Stickles Dep. 37.*

Nic and Mike had finally made it to Charles and Gary and helped them up out of the water and into their boat. GSFD asked if they were alright. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 57.* They were fine—unhurt with no injuries. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 57; DE 49, Musser Dep. 16.* GSFD did not administer any care or “first aid or nothing.” *DE 44, Carter Dep. 57; DE 49, Musser Dep. 18.* Mike and Nic then rowed to shore, which took them five minutes or so. *DE 42, Frey Dep. 26; DE 44, Carter Dep. 56.* Brad and Tyler towed Gary’s boat to shore. *DE 58, Jett Dep. 14.* GSFD provided no assistance in towing or bringing the boat up to shore. *DE 54, Carpenter Dep. at 14-15.*

Once the Brush Truck arrived, Knieriemen took the fuel to Mike Carter, who told him he brought the wrong type. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 60.* There is a clear indication on the can that it was not the correct fuel, but Knieriemen ignored it. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 78.* Carter instructed Knieriemen to get the correct fuel-mix and bring it back. *Id.* Charles and Gary hopped into the backseat of the Brush Truck to be taken to the front of the reservoir. *DE 48, Musser Dep. 16.* Knieriemen stood on the platform on the back of the truck with Luke Cantu while Chris Stickles drove the truck around the reservoir back towards the front. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 37; LC Dep. 25; DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 80.* En route, the firefighters passed the Decedent walking. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 37.* As she saw the fire truck approach, she stepped off the walking trail and down the left side of the embankment and let them pass her. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 36-38.* Chris Stickles said that once they passed her, he saw her return to the path and continue walking. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 37-38.*

Back at the staging area, GSFD was met by Republic EMS. *LC Dep. 26.* GSFD handed Charles and Gary off to Republic and, with respect to their “rescue,” they were done. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 33; DE 50, Cantu Dep. 26; DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 107.*

Knieriemen finally obtained the correct fuel and Chris Stickles drove Knieriemen and Luke Cantu back out to where the GSFD boat was anchored at the shore. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 34; DE 50, Cantu Dep. 25; DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 86-87.* The men knew they had to drive to the back of the embankment because they brought the wrong fuel the first time. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 90, 112.*

E. KNIERIEMEN RUNS OVER THE DECEDENT

Stickles drove the truck to GSFD’s boat, placed the truck in park, and everyone exited. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 88; DE 56, Stickles Dep. 34.* Mike Carter was in the boat when the truck returned. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 62.* Knieriemen claimed he brought the fuel can from the truck, handed it to Carter, and stayed while Carter refueled the boat. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 62, 93.* As he was refueling, Mike saw a woman walking toward the

parked Brush Truck. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Ex. A, GS-000022*. After he refueled, he handed the can back to Knieriemen. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 62*. Mike pressurized the tank and restarted the boat while Knieriemen was still down with him. *Id.* Once the boat started, Knieriemen headed back up the embankment to the Brush Truck. *Id.* Knieriemen put the can in the driver's side bed of the truck, then got into the truck and backed up. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 101*.

Knieriemen estimated that he was 100-200 feet ahead of where Gary's boat had been brought to shore, which is where he says he was backing-up to. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 95*. Lieutenant Stickles, the operator of the Truck, said no one requested Knieriemen move or back-up the truck up. *DE 56, Stickles Dep 47*. It was something he took upon himself to do. *Id.* Knieriemen later acknowledged that it was in fact his decision to back the truck up. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Ex B, RFA #43*.

Knieriemen testified he is 5'10" tall. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 104*. Stickles, who had been the previous driver of the Brush Truck, stands 6'2". *Id.* Despite the significant height difference, Knieriemen said he made no adjustments to the mirrors. *Id.*

Although he knew that there were several firefighters and pedestrians behind the truck, Knieriemen never told them he was backing up and they were not aware that he was backing up towards them. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 39; Ex. A, GS-000018; DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 122, 127*. Knieriemen knew the truck's rear-view mirror was almost completely obstructed by equipment in the back of the truck. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 76*. Knieriemen knew that the truck was not equipped with a back-up alarm like virtually every other GSFD vehicle, nor did it have a back-up camera. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 49-50*. Despite the obstructed view behind the truck, he did not walk around the vehicle before getting in and backing it up. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Ex B, RFA #43*. He did not request a spotter or ground guide. *Id. at RFA #48; DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 122-23*. Knieriemen took no effort to audibly or verbally warn those behind the truck that he was backing-up. *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Ex B, RFA #43*.

The Brush Truck was equipped with a radio that could have been used to warn people he was backing or to request a spotter. *DE 44, Carter Dep. 36.* Knieriemen claimed there was no purpose in using a radio. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 122.* Knieriemen had knowledge of GSFD's SOG explicit mandate that an "apparatus shall not be backed-up" without a spotter, but he dismissed the rule as nothing more than a "suggestion." *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep 39, 44.* Disturbingly, Knieriemen testified that when he backed-up, he presumed the people behind him were watching out for him. *Id.*

While Knieriemen was backing up, Lieutenant Stickles happened to look up and see the Brush Truck moving toward everyone. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 36.* Stickles saw Knieriemen was backing up toward a woman walking on the trail, who had earbuds in. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 39.* Stickles began to scream "**stop, stop, stop!**" *DE 69, Opp to MSJ, Ex. A, GS-000018; DE 50, Cantu Dep. 32; DE 52, Frey Dep. 34; DE 54, Carpenter Dep. 11.* But Knieriemen continued and hit the Decedent. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 39.* Knieriemen claims that he felt something that felt like maybe gear had fallen out of the bed of the truck. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 128-129, 133.* Despite "feeling" like he hit something, he claims it did not alarm him or cause him to stop backing-up. *DE 46, Knieriemen Dep. 133-134.* As Lieutenant Stickles was running towards Knieriemen and screaming for him to stop, he saw Knieriemen drive the truck right over the woman's spine and then over the top of her skull. *DE 56, Stickles Dep. 39.* Stickles continued towards the truck yelling "stop, you just ran somebody over." *DE 46, Knieriemen, Dep 131.* Only then did Knieriemen stop the truck. *Id. at 130.*

ARGUMENT

Two Propositions of Law are being presented for this Court's consideration, both of which present issues of public and great general importance.

PROPOSITION OF LAW I: THE EXCEPTIONS TO POLITICAL DIVISION LIABILITY FOR EMERGENCY VEHICLE RESPONSES APPLY ONLY DURING THE COURSE OF SUCH EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES WHEN QUICK RESPONSES ARE NECESSARY AND THERE IS MINIMAL OPPORTUNITY FOR CAREFUL REFLECTION

For sound reasons, the General Assembly has determined that local governments can be held liable for motor vehicle accidents negligently caused by their employees under R.C. 2744.02(B)(1). Specific exceptions have been adopted for law enforcement officers and emergency rescue personnel responding to emergency calls or alarms. *Id.* These provisions have plainly been adopted out of a recognition that careful decisions cannot be made under the pressure of exigent circumstances, and thus proof of mere negligence will not suffice. A fundamental principle of statutory instruction recognizes that such exceptions should be narrowly construed. *See generally Haynay v. Bd. of Liquor Control*, 98 Ohio App. 419, 421-422, 129 N.E.2d 841 (2nd Dist.1954); 85 OHIO JURISPRUDENCE 3d, Statutes, Section 317, at 349 (1988).

The “emergency call” provision applicable to police officers was examined in *Colbert v. Cleveland*, 99 Ohio St.3d 215, 2003-Ohio-3319, 790 N.E.2d 781. In that instance, two police officers had observed a suspected drug deal in a high-crime area. *Id.* at ¶ 3. As they were actively pursuing the suspects’ car, they were involved in an accident in an intersection with another motorist. *Id.* at ¶ 4. The majority construed the phrase “emergency call” to be analogous to a “call to duty” and concluded that:

Accordingly, we hold that an “emergency call” as defined in R.C. 2744.01(A) involves a situation to which a response by a peace officer is required by the officer’s professional obligation.

Id. at ¶ 15.

Consistent with *Colbert*, Ohio courts traditionally limit an “emergency call” to an

actual response initiated by a call or directive. *See generally Burnell v. Dulle*, 169 Ohio App.3d 792, 2006-Ohio-7044, 865 N.E.2d 86, ¶ 15-16 (12th Dist.) (on duty police officer was not engaged in “emergency call” while traveling to court appearance); *Malone v. Torres*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 92878, 2010-Ohio-157, ¶ 17-19 (distinguishing *Colbert* because officers had initiated a high speed chase on their own after allegedly observing another motorist committing minor traffic infractions); *Brown v. Cuyahoga Falls*, 9th Dist. Summit No. 24914, 2010-Ohio-4330, ¶ 14-16 (on-duty officer strikes a pedestrian after deciding to respond to a general dispatch that was not specifically directed to him); *Jones v. Schramm*, 2016-Ohio-7403, 63 N.E.3d 1240, ¶ 16-22 (8th Dist.) (finding that emergency call exception was not satisfied where officer was responding to a subpoena to testify in court).

This Court should establish the rule statewide that the heightened requirements for willful and wanton misconduct apply only to activities actually conducted during the emergency call. Before the pressing and urgent circumstances begin, and after they have concluded, there is the usual opportunity for careful evaluation and reflection. The General Assembly undoubtedly intended that negligence liability would be barred only during those periods when quick reactions and decision-making must occur. Here, reasonable jurors could find that the “emergency alarm” was over and no exigent circumstances remained when Knieriemen backed the pick-up on his own volition without bothering to ensure that no one was behind the vehicle. No public interest of any kind is furthered by stretching the exception to immunity to cover such disturbing dereliction. This Court should therefore accept and consider this first Proposition of Law.

PROPOSITION OF LAW II: THE RECKLESSNESS STANDARD THAT APPLIES TO CLAIMS OF INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE NEGLIGENCE UNDER R.C. 2744.03(A)(6)(b) DOES NOT REQUIRE THE SAME DEGREE OF PROOF AS THE TEST FOR WILLFUL, WANTON AND MALICIOUS MISCONDUCT

Plaintiff’s Second Proposition of Law addresses the appellate court majority’s

determination that no reasonable juror could find that Knieriemen had acted recklessly when he backed over the jogger who was standing directly behind his truck. *R.C. 2744.03(A)(6)(b)*. The rash decision is irreconcilable with numerous other cases where such misconduct was found under far less extreme circumstances. *Burnell*, 169 Ohio App.3d 792, 2006-Ohio-7044, 865 N.E.2d 86 (deputy sheriff striking plaintiff with vehicle while on duty); *Piispanen v. Carter*, 11th Dist. Lake No. 2005-L-133, 2006-Ohio-2382 (school principal found to be potentially liable for reckless and wanton misconduct allegedly committed in course of employment); *Senu-Oke v. Bd. of Edn. of Dayton City School Dist.*, 2^d Dist. Montgomery No. 20967, 2005-Ohio-5239 (recognizing that allegations of reckless and wanton misconduct against assistant superintendent survived a motion to dismiss); *Rankin v. Cuyahoga Cty. Dept. of Children & Family Servs.*, 118 Ohio St.3d 392, 2008-Ohio-2567, 889 N.E.2d 521 (director and employee of department could be liable for reckless and wanton misconduct); *Bolling v. N. Olmsted City Schools Bd. of Edn.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 90669, 2008-Ohio-5347 (reasonable minds could conclude that employees' actions were reckless); *Moss v. Lorain Cty. Bd. of Mental Retardation*, 185 Ohio App.3d 395, 2009-Ohio-6931, 924 N.E.2d 401 (9th Dist.) (complaint alleging that teachers acted recklessly in allowing special needs student to be scalded with coffee was sufficient to survive motion to dismiss); *Charles v. Cardington-Lincoln Local School Dist.*, 5th Dist. Morrow No. 821, 1996 WL 488847 (Aug. 19, 1996) (jury trial necessary over whether student had severed her hand as a result of vocational teacher's negligence).

Here, sensible jurors could easily conclude that Knieriemen's stunning indifference to the safety of the people standing and walking around his pick-up truck was far more than just negligent. He knew that there was no back-up alarm and the rear view mirrors could not cover the entire area behind the vehicle. Had he in fact checked behind the Brush Truck, as he attempted to claim during his deposition, he could not have helped to have noticed the Decedent as well as others who were close by. In Knieriemen's

misguided view, they were all supposed to be looking out for him to suddenly start and move the truck. A stronger case for recklessness is difficult to fathom. This Court should therefore accept this second proposition of law.

CONCLUSION

Given the issues of public and great general issues that are at stake, this Court should accept jurisdiction over this appeal.

Respectfully Submitted,

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IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF OHIO
THIRD APPELLATE DISTRICT
SENECA COUNTY

FILED IN THE COURT OF APPEALS
SENECA COUNTY

OCT 9 2018

PAUL RIEHM, ADMINISTRATOR
OF THE ESTATE OF LORRI J.
RIEHM, DECEASED,

JEAN A. ECKELBERRY, CLERK

PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE,

CASE NO. 13-18-15

v.
GREEN SPRINGS RURAL VOLUNTEER
FIRE DEPARTMENT, ET AL.,

O P I N I O N

DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS.

Appeal from Seneca County Common Pleas Court
Trial Court No. 16-CV-0314

Judgment Reversed and Cause Remanded

Date of Decision: October 9, 2018

APPEARANCES:

Stephen D. Strang and Gary L. Nicholson for Appellants

Charles E. Boyk and Wesley D. Merillat for Appellee

SHAW, J.

{¶1} Defendants-appellants, Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department (“GSRVFD”) and Seth T. Knieriemen (“Knieriemen”), bring this appeal from the April 20, 2018, judgment of the Seneca County Common Pleas Court denying their summary judgment motions seeking immunity in a negligence, wrongful death and survival action brought by plaintiff-appellee, Paul Riehm, Administrator of the Estate of Lorri Riehm. On appeal, appellants contend that the trial court erred by denying their motions for summary judgment based on immunity.

I. Relevant Facts and Procedural History

a. Parties

{¶2} GSRVFD is an Ohio non-profit corporation with its principal place of business in Green Springs, Seneca County, Ohio. Knieriemen was a member of GSRVFD.

{¶3} Paul Riehm is the husband of Lorri Riehm, who died on June 28, 2016, when she was backed over by Knieriemen while he was operating a GSRVFD “brush” truck.¹ At the time of the incident, Knieriemen was assisting with a capsized boat on the Beaver Creek Reservoir, and Lorri was taking a walk around the reservoir.

¹ Testimony indicated that a “brush” truck was used to “put out grass fires,” and to haul smaller equipment. (Carter Depo. at 27).

b. Incident Leading to Litigation

{¶4} On June 28, 2016, Gary Overmyer and Charles Musser were fishing on a 12-foot aluminum boat with an electric trolling motor at the Beaver Creek Reservoir. At some point, Gary's chair broke, shifting the weight in the boat, and the boat capsized, tossing Gary and Charles into the water. Someone on the shore saw the capsized boat and called the authorities.

{¶5} There was one other boat on the reservoir at the time, on the opposite side, with two fishermen in it. An individual on the shore told the fishermen about the capsized boat, so they gathered their things and went to assist. When they reached the capsized boat, they were unable to get Gary and Charles into their boat, so they had them hang onto the side.

{¶6} GSRVFD received the call regarding the capsized boat and dispatched numerous members, including Knieriemen, to the reservoir, along with several of the department's apparatuses. Knieriemen traveled to the reservoir as a passenger in GSRVFD's "Brush 14," a Ford F-350 Super Duty, 4x4 pickup truck. Brush 14 had been modified by adding a "skid unit" in the bed of the truck, which was described as a tank and fire pump. It obstructed approximately 70 percent of the view from the rear-view mirror. A "protector," or steel-platform, was also placed on the back of the truck for firefighters to stand on when combatting field fires.

{¶7} Brush 14 contained a trailer hitch and towed a rescue boat to the reservoir. Engine 15, Engine 10, and Tanker 16 also responded to the scene, containing various members of the department.

{¶8} Upon arrival at the reservoir, Knieriemen and other members of the GSRVFD used the boat ramp on the eastern shore to launch the rescue boat. The capsized boat was near the opposite side of the reservoir from the boat ramp. Knieriemen remained ashore while two other GSRVFD members went in the rescue boat.

{¶9} Before the rescue boat reached the capsized boaters, it ran out of fuel. The firemen radioed to shore to indicate they were out of fuel, then proceeded to paddle the rest of the way to the capsized boaters. The firemen retrieved the boaters, then took them to the nearest shoreline, on the west side of the reservoir.

{¶10} GSRVFD's Chief directed members on the eastern shoreline to bring fuel to the rescue boat on the west side of the reservoir. Knieriemen and other GSRVFD members got a gas can and took Brush 14 to the top of the embankment around the reservoir to the west side. However, after arrival, they learned that they had brought the wrong fuel for the rescue boat. Still, they loaded the two rescued boaters into Brush 14 and drove back to the other side of the reservoir and dropped the boaters off with an EMS unit that had also responded to the scene. Then, the

GSRVFD members obtained the correct fuel and returned it to the rescue boat on the west side of the reservoir.

{¶11} In the meantime, the other boaters on the reservoir had tied a rope around the capsized boat and pulled it to the western shoreline. The capsized boat was not directly beside the rescue boat, however, having drifted.

{¶12} Brush 14 stopped parallel to the rescue boat when it returned with the correct fuel to the west side of the reservoir. The proper fuel was taken down to the boat. Then, Knieriemen was informed that the other GSRVFD members were having trouble removing the capsized boat from the reservoir so he brought the truck over so they could use it to pull the boat out of the water.² The capsized boat was still near the western shore when Brush 14 returned with the fuel can, but it was between 50 feet and 200 feet away depending on estimates of the GSRVFD members.

{¶13} Knieriemen walked back to Brush 14, which had its emergency flashers still in operation but it did not have a reverse warning siren. Knieriemen got into the vehicle, checked all three of his mirrors, and did not see anyone in front or behind him other than, “the guys -- our personnel further back here (indicating).”

² The trial court cited the deposition of Cristin Stickles, who stated that “no one” asked Knieriemen to bring Brush 14 over to assist in pulling the boat out of the water. Knieriemen testified that he could not remember if he was asked to move Brush 14. However, Michael Carter testified that there was a discussion that moving Brush 14 to assist in pulling the boat out of the water “needed to be done,” and that was where Knieriemen “was going.” (Carter Depo. Tr. at 62).

(Knieriemen, Depo. at 103). He then placed the truck in reverse, and drove it backwards on the embankment path at under 5 mph towards where the other GSRVFD members were working to remove the formerly capsized boat.³ He indicated that he did not push the throttle down.

{¶14} Meanwhile Lorri Riehm was walking on the path with headphones in her ears and her cell phone out. Lorri regularly went to the reservoir to walk, and she had that evening as well. She passed Brush 14 just as Knieriemen was getting into it. One member of GSRVFD had seen Lorri walking around the rim of the reservoir, but none of the others deposed indicated that they had.

{¶15} Lorri's back was to Brush 14 as the truck reversed. Cristin Stickles, one of the GSRVFD members, noticed Lorri and saw that Knieriemen was about to back into her. He screamed for Knieriemen to stop multiple times, but by the time Knieriemen finally stopped, he had completely run Lorri over. As Knieriemen was backing up, he felt something very small in the truck, as though something shifted in the truck bed or turnout gear had fallen.

{¶16} Brush 14's back tire ran over Lorri's spine and the top of her skull. It would seem Stickles was the only GSRVFD member who saw the incident, as the other individuals in the area had their backs turned dealing with the boats in the reservoir.

³ Knieriemen testified in his deposition that he did not adjust the mirrors in the truck when he got in. He testified that he was 5'10" and the previous driver was 6'2".

{¶17} Lorri died on scene as a result of her injuries.

c. Litigation

{¶18} On December 13, 2016, Paul Riehm, administrator of Lorri's estate, filed a complaint against GSRVFD and Knieriemen individually, alleging, *inter alia*, negligence, recklessness, respondeat superior, wrongful death, and a survival action.

{¶19} A joint answer was filed on February 24, 2017, by GSRVFD and Knieriemen asserting, *inter alia*, qualified immunity.

{¶20} A number of depositions were taken of various GSRVFD members that were on the scene, the boaters involved, and the police who investigated the matter.

{¶21} On January 18, 2018, Knieriemen filed for summary judgment, asserting immunity as an employee of GSRVFD under R.C. 2744.03(A)(6). He argued that while it was clear that Lorri's death was a tragic accident, the evidence did not establish that Knieriemen's actions were in bad faith, wanton, or reckless to remove immunity. He also requested the court dismiss the survival claim because there was no evidence of conscious pain and suffering on Lorri's behalf.

{¶22} GSRVFD filed a motion for summary judgment asserting political subdivision immunity under R.C. 2744.02(B)(1)(b). GSRVFD argued that there was no indication that Knieriemen's actions were anything beyond negligent to rise

to the level of willful or wanton, which was required to remove GSRVFD's immunity.

{¶23} On February 21, 2018, Riehm filed consolidated response to the summary judgment motions. On March 1, 2018, GSRVFD and Knieriemen both filed replies.

{¶24} On April 20, 2018, the trial court filed a judgment entry denying the appellants' summary judgment motions. The court first determined that GSRVFD was a political subdivision based on R.C. 9.60(F), which states that a private fire company providing service to a governmental entity has the same immunities and defenses that a political subdivision has under R.C. 2744.02. The trial court also determined that the harm Lorri incurred was in connection with a government function.

{¶25} The trial court then had to determine whether any exceptions to immunity applied, and one exception did apply, being R.C. 2744.02(B)(1), wherein GSRVFD would be liable for death as a result of negligent operation of any motor vehicle by their employee when the employee was within the scope of his employment. However, there was a full defense available to liability under R.C. 2744.02(B)(b), which states "A member of a municipal corporation fire department or any other firefighting agency was operating a motor vehicle while engaged in duty at a fire, proceeding toward a place where a fire is in progress or is

believed to be in progress, or answering any other emergency alarm and the operation of the vehicle did not constitute willful or wanton misconduct[.]”

{¶26} Therefore if Knieriemen was still answering an emergency alarm and his operation of the vehicle did not constitute willful or wanton misconduct, GSrvfd would not be liable for Lorri’s injuries. The trial court found that Knieriemen was answering an emergency and acting within the scope of his employment, thus GSrvfd was entitled to immunity unless Knieriemen’s actions were willful or wanton. Knieriemen was individually entitled to immunity unless his acts were with malicious purpose, in bad faith, or in a wanton or reckless manner.

{¶27} After defining the operative terms of willful, wanton, and reckless based on precedent from the Supreme Court of Ohio, the trial court reasoned as follows.

There is a genuine issue of material fact regarding whether Knieriemen’s actions were wanton, willful, or reckless on June 28, 2016. Defendant Knieriemen knew there were pedestrians at the reservoir. (Plaintiff’s Opposition p. 23). He knew the truck had obstructed visibility out the rear. (Knieriemen Dep. At 76). He knew there were at least five (5) individuals behind the truck, yet he never advised anyone he was backing up; did not activate the siren or honk the horn to alert people. (Stickles Dep. At 39; Knieriemen Dep. At 122). He never did a walk around of the vehicle to check that it was clear. (Plaintiff’s Opposition, Ex. B, RFA #44). He never requested a spotter. (Plaintiff’s Opposition p. 23). He had access to a radio and never asked for guidance. (*Id.*) When asked why, he claimed there was no purpose in using a radio. (Knieriemen Dep. At 122). He claimed that providing assistance in backing up a vehicle “is not a common practice” and

he presumes the people behind him are watching out for him. (*Id.* at 127).

Defendants Green Springs RVFD and Knieriemen argue that Knieriemen checked his three mirrors before backing up and didn't see anyone. (Knieriemen Dep. At 103, 129-130). The emergency flashers were already on. (*Id.*) He then proceeded slowly, and did not even push the throttle down. (*Id.*) Reasonable minds could come to different conclusions regarding whether defendant Knieriemen's actions were wanton, willful, or reckless. Accordingly, summary judgment is not appropriate in this matter on the issue of political subdivision immunity.

(Doc. No. 76). The trial court also determined that a genuine issue of material fact remained regarding the survival action.

{¶28} Appellants bring this appeal from the trial court's denial of their summary judgment motions, asserting the following assignments of error for our review.

Assignment of Error No. 1

The trial court erred in denying appellant Green Springs Volunteer Fire Department's Motion for Summary Judgment.

Assignment of Error No. 2

The trial court erred in denying Appellant Seth T. Knieriemen's Motion for Summary Judgment.

Assignment of Error No. 3

The trial court erred in denying the dismissal of the Appellee's survival action.

II. Law and Analysis

a. Standard of Review

{¶29} “Whether a party is entitled to immunity is a question of law properly determined by the court prior to trial pursuant to a motion for summary judgment.” *Pelletier v. City of Campbell*, --- Ohio St.3d ---, 2018-Ohio-2121, ¶ 12, citing *Conley v. Shearer*, 64 Ohio St.3d 284, 292, 595 N.E.2d 862 (1992) and *Riscatti v. Prime Properties Ltd. Partnership*, 137 Ohio St.3d 123, 2013-Ohio-4530, 998 N.E.2d 437, ¶ 17 (noting the importance of deciding a political subdivision’s entitlement to immunity before trial).

{¶30} The review of a summary judgment denying political-subdivision immunity is de novo and is governed by the summary-judgment standard set forth in Civ.R. 56. *Pelletier* at ¶ 13, citing *Comer v. Risko*, 106 Ohio St.3d 185, 2005-Ohio-4559, 833 N.E.2d 712, ¶ 8.

{¶31} The Supreme Court of Ohio explained in *M.H. v. Cuyahoga Falls*,

Summary judgment may be granted when “(1) [n]o genuine issue as to any material fact remains to be litigated; (2) the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law; and (3) it appears from the evidence that reasonable minds can come to but one conclusion, and viewing such evidence most strongly in favor of the party against whom the motion for summary judgment is made, that conclusion is adverse to that party.”

(Brackets sic.) 134 Ohio St.3d 65, 2012-Ohio-5336, 979 N.E.2d 1261, ¶ 12, quoting *Temple v. Wean United, Inc.*, 50 Ohio St.2d 317, 327, 364 N.E.2d 267 (1977).

b. Political Subdivision Immunity

{¶32} Although GSRVFD is a private, nonprofit entity, Revised Code 9.60 provides that

A private fire company or private, nonprofit emergency medical service organization providing service pursuant to this section to a governmental entity in this state or another jurisdiction has the same immunities and defenses in a civil action that a political subdivision has under section 2744.02 of the Revised Code. The employees of such a fire company or emergency medical service organization have the same immunities and defenses in a civil action that employees of a political subdivision have under section 2744.03 of the Revised Code.

Thus if GSRVFD was providing service to a governmental entity, it has the same immunities as a political subdivision, and its employees would as well.

{¶33} Determining whether a political subdivision is immune from tort liability pursuant to R.C. Chapter 2744 involves a familiar, three-tiered analysis:

“The first tier is the general rule that a political subdivision is immune from liability incurred in performing either a governmental function or proprietary function. * * * However, that immunity is not absolute. R.C. 2744.02(B); *Cater v. Cleveland*, 83 Ohio St.3d 24, 28, 697 N.E.2d 610 (1988).

“The second tier of the analysis requires a court to determine whether any of the five exceptions to immunity listed in R.C. 2744.02(B) apply to expose the political subdivision to liability. *Id.* at 28, 697 N.E.2d 610. At this tier, the court may also

need to determine whether specific defenses to liability for negligent operation of a motor vehicle listed in R.C. 2744.02(B)(1)(a) through (c) apply.

“If any of the exceptions to immunity in R.C. 2744.02(B) do apply and no defense in that section protects the political subdivision from liability, then the third tier of the analysis requires a court to determine whether any of the defenses in R.C. 2744.03 apply, thereby providing the political subdivision a defense against liability.”

(Ellipsis sic.) *Riffle v. Physicians & Surgeons Ambulance Serv., Inc.*, 135 Ohio St.3d 357, 2013-Ohio-989, 986 N.E.2d 983, ¶ 15, quoting *Colbert v. Cleveland*, 99 Ohio St.3d 215, 2003-Ohio-3319, 790 N.E.2d 781, ¶ 7-9.

c. First Tier Immunity Analysis

{¶34} The first determination that needs to be made in this case is whether GSRVFD is entitled to claim the immunities of a political subdivision. The appellee argues, contrary to the trial court’s finding, that GSRVFD did not demonstrate that it was performing contractual fire protection for a governmental entity.

{¶35} The trial court found that GSRVFD provided fire and rescue services and that pursuant to R.C. 9.60 it was entitled to the same immunities extended to a political subdivision. The trial court also determined that the alleged harm in this case occurred in connection with a government function, reasoning that providing rescue services satisfied the governmental function.

{¶36} We agree with the trial court. There is no evidence in the record that GSRVFD is anything but a private, non-profit entity that provides, *inter alia*, fire

and rescue services to the area of the incident in question. Thus the evidence indicates that GSRVFD was performing contractual services for a governmental entity.

{¶37} While the appellee argues that there was no indication that GSRVFD was providing contractual “fire protection” in *this* case, the definition of “fire protection” in R.C. 9.60 includes “rescue” services, and R.C. 2744.01(C)(2)(a) similarly states that rescue services qualifies as a governmental function.⁴ The trial court found that the rescue services in this case amounted to a governmental function, and we agree. Thus in the first tier analysis, GSRVFD would qualify for the immunities in R.C. 2744.02, and Knieriemen as its employee, would as well.

d. Second Tier Immunity Analysis

{¶38} In the second tier of the immunity analysis, we look at whether any exceptions to apply to expose the entity to liability. Revised Code 2744.02(B)(1) contains an exception that reads, “Except as otherwise provided in this division, political subdivisions are liable for injury, death, or loss to person or property caused by the negligent operation of any motor vehicle by their employees when the employees are engaged within the scope of their employment and authority.” Thus there is a general exception to immunity in this case.

⁴ Appellee seems to assert that in order to satisfy the first tier immunity analysis, GSRVFD and Knieriemen should have had to attach the contract describing precisely what services GSRVFD was contracted to provide.

{¶39} However, R.C. 2744.02(B)(1) also contains “full defenses to that liability.” As relevant to this case, R.C. 2744.02(B)(1)(b) provides a full defense to liability if, “A member of a municipal corporation fire department or any other firefighting agency was operating a motor vehicle while engaged in duty at a fire, proceeding toward a place where a fire is in progress or is believed to be in progress, or answering any other emergency alarm and the operation of the vehicle did not constitute willful or wanton misconduct[.]”

{¶40} Based on this section of the Revised Code, GSRVFD would have a full defense to liability if Knieriemen was “engaged in duty at a fire,” or “answering any other emergency alarm,” *and* Knieriemen’s operation of the vehicle did not constitute willful or wanton misconduct. The trial court found that “Knieriemen was assisting in an active emergency scene at the time of the accident[,]” summarily indicating that he satisfied the requirement to be “answering any other emergency alarm.” The appellee did not file a cross-appeal regarding this finding of the trial court; however, the appellee does maintain that a denial of summary judgment is appropriate in this case as there is an issue of fact as to whether Knieriemen was answering an emergency alarm. The appellee seems to want to restrict the language in the statute; however, given that the statute provides for conduct when “engaged in duty at a fire” it would stand to reason that “answering any other emergency alarm” would encompass more than merely getting to a rescue scene. *See Campbell*

v. Colley, 113 Ohio App.3d 14, 20, 680 N.E.2d 201, 204 (4th Dist.1996) (“courts have interpreted the word ‘emergency’ broadly as it applies to the characterization of situations to which emergency personnel respond.”). We see no reason to depart from the trial court’s finding on this issue.⁵ Thus GSRVFD would have a full defense to liability if Knieriemen’s conduct was not willful or wanton.

{¶41} Similarly, Knieriemen individually would be entitled to immunity as an employee of a political subdivision pursuant to R.C. 2744.03(A)(6) unless his acts were manifestly outside the scope of his employment or responsibilities or his acts or omissions were not done with malicious purpose, in bad faith, in a wanton or reckless manner.

{¶42} The Supreme Court of Ohio has defined all of the requisite operative terms—willful, wanton, and reckless—finding that they describe different and distinct degrees of care and are not interchangeable.

{¶43} “Willful misconduct implies an intentional deviation from a clear duty or from a definite rule of conduct, a deliberate purpose not to discharge some duty necessary to safety, or purposefully doing wrongful acts with knowledge or appreciation of the likelihood of resulting injury.” *Anderson v. Massillon*, 134 Ohio St.3d 380, 2012-Ohio-5711, 983 N.E.2d 266 (2012) at paragraph 2 of syllabus.

⁵ We would note that while at the time of the accident the capsized boaters had been rescued, their boat remained in the water and the other boaters on the reservoir had run out of power trying to assist.

{¶44} “Wanton misconduct is the failure to exercise any care toward those to whom a duty of care is owed in circumstances in which there is great probability that harm will result.” *Anderson* at paragraph 3 of syllabus.

{¶45} “Reckless conduct is characterized by the conscious disregard of or indifference to a known or obvious risk of harm to another that is unreasonable under the circumstances and is substantially greater than negligent conduct.” *Anderson* at paragraph 4 of syllabus.

{¶46} “All three standards—willful, wanton, and reckless—describe conduct that is more than mere negligence. * * * If reasonable minds could only conclude that the employee’s conduct demonstrates, at most, negligence, then summary judgment is appropriate.” *Hoffman v. Gallia Cty. Sheriff’s Office*, 4th Dist. Gallia No. 17CA2, 2017-Ohio-9192, ¶ 47

{¶47} The events that occurred in this case are essentially undisputed. The reservoir was a recreational area where people occasionally went to boat, fish, and walk, amongst other things. On the evening of the incident, Lorri had gone to the reservoir to walk.

{¶48} Knieriemen was at the reservoir in response to a call regarding a capsized boat.⁶ After the occupants of the capsized boat were rescued, GSRVFD

⁶ In an attempt to characterize the department as perhaps habitually negligent at the scene, appellees argue that GSRVFD actually sent a specific water rescue unit away. However, testimony indicated that the water rescue unit only arrived after GSRVFD “had already been across to the boaters.” (Chief Lowe Depo. at 70).

members were still attempting to get the boat out of the water. In order to assist with pulling the boat out of the water, Knieriemen went to move Brush 14 from near the rescue boat to near the formerly capsized boat. Michael Carter, Jr., of GSRVFD testified that as Knieriemen was entering one side of the vehicle, Lorri was walking past the other side. (Carter Depo. at 64-65). Carter was down by the water at the time. Knieriemen did not walk around Brush 14 or seek a spotter.

{¶49} The emergency lights were still on in Brush 14, but it did not have an alarm for reverse at the time. Knieriemen checked all three of his mirrors, which included the rearview mirror with its obstructed view. He did not see anyone other than their personnel, then he placed Brush 14 in reverse. Knieriemen indicated he did not push the throttle down, and that he backed up at less than 5 mph.⁷

{¶50} Cristin Stickles of GSRVFD saw Lorri walking behind Brush 14 with headphones in and her cell phone out. She was “right behind the truck * * * so there wasn’t like a gap or any distance in between them.” (Stickles Depo. at 46). He yelled for Knieriemen to stop multiple times, but by the time he did he had run Lorri over.

{¶51} It seems evident from the facts that Knieriemen’s conduct could constitute negligence; however, in order for GSRVFD to be subject to liability, his

⁷ The officer investigating the scene testified that he saw no indication of “horseplay,” that there was no indication that Knieriemen knew he would probably injure someone when backing up, and no indication that he acted recklessly. (Deputy Smith Depo. at 76-78).

conduct had to be *far* beyond negligent. His conduct had to either be willful or wanton. Willful indicates a deliberate act, which the evidence simply does not support here in any respect. Thus we must focus on wanton misconduct.

{¶52} Notably, by definition, wanton misconduct is the failure to exercise *any care* in a circumstance where there is a *great probability* that harm will result. There certainly was more that Knieriemen could have done in this case, but, there is no indication that he failed to exercise *any care*.

{¶53} Knieriemen checked all three of his mirrors and saw no one in his path, and he backed up slowly while the emergency lights were still flashing. There is no evidence that he backed up quickly or that he did so without paying any attention whatsoever to his surroundings. To the contrary, the only evidence in the record demonstrates that Knieriemen did exercise *some care*. *See Ibrahim v. City of Dayton*, 2d Dist. Montgomery No. 27699, 2018-Ohio-1318, ¶ 17 (officer who backed up car without checking behind him exercised “at least a modicum of care” by reversing at a low speed such that wanton conduct was not present); *Scott v. Kashmiry*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 15AP-139, 2015-Ohio-3902, ¶ (“failure to heed caution still rises only to the level of negligence. * * * ‘Mere negligence is not converted into wanton misconduct unless the evidence establishes a disposition to perversity on the part of the tortfeasor,’ and ‘[s]uch perversity must be under such conditions that the actor must be conscious that his conduct will in all probability

result in injury.' (Internal quotations omitted.) *Rankin v. Cuyahoga Cty. Dept. of Children & Family Servs.*, 118 Ohio St.3d 392, 2008-Ohio-2567, 889 N.E.2d 521, ¶ 37.).

{¶54} This case certainly presents a tragic accident, but the immunity statutes were designed to prevent liability unless certain extreme conduct was present. The facts of this case do not rise to the level of willful or wanton conduct to subject GSRVFD to liability.

{¶55} The trial court seemed particularly concerned with Knieriemen's failure to walk around the vehicle or to get a spotter, things that were suggested in the standard operating guidelines for GSRVFD. However, these issues may show that Knieriemen was negligent, but they do not show that he was acting willfully or wantonly, failing to exercise *any* care. *See Argabrite v. Neer*, 149 Ohio St.3d 349, 2016-Ohio-8374, ¶ 25 (2016), quoting *O'Toole*, 118 Ohio St.3d 374, 2008-Ohio-2574, 889 N.E.2d 505, at paragraph three of the syllabus. (" '[E]vidence of a violation of departmental policy does not create a genuine issue of material fact as to whether the violator acted with malicious purpose, in bad faith or in a wanton or recklessness [sic] manner without evidence that the violator was aware that his "conduct [would] in all probability result in injury.' "). Thus we find that the trial court erred on this matter.

{¶56} As to Knieriemen individually, he could still be liable if his conduct constituted recklessness. Recklessness implies conduct that is substantially greater than negligence. Knieriemen's failure to follow standard operating guidelines does not establish a genuine issue of material fact as to whether there was more than negligence here, particularly where he did not see, and perhaps could not have seen, Lorri. Knieriemen's conduct could certainly be considered negligent, but not substantially greater than negligent. Therefore, we find that the trial court also erred on this issue.

{¶57} Based on our resolution of the second tier analysis, we need not proceed to the third tier related to GSRVFD, therefore, appellants' first assignment of error is sustained. As we have determined that Knieriemen's conduct was not reckless, appellant's second assignment of error is also sustained.

{¶58} In appellants' third assignment of error, they argue that the trial court erred in denying their summary judgment motion regarding a survival action. However, based on our resolution of the first and second assignments of error, we are compelled to sustain the third assignment of error as the appellants are rendered immune from liability. Therefore, the third assignment of error is also sustained.

IV. Conclusion

{¶59} For the foregoing reasons the assignments of error are sustained and the judgment of the Seneca County Common Pleas Court is Reversed. This cause is remanded to the trial court for further proceedings consistent with this opinion.

***Judgment Reversed and
Cause Remanded***

PRESTON, J., concurs.

/jlr

ZIMMERMAN, J., dissents.

{¶60} Whether or not a political subdivision *or* its employee may *invoke* immunity under R.C. Chapter 2744 is generally a question of law. *Hoffman v. Gallia Cty. Sheriff's Office*, 4th Dist. Gallia No. 17CA2, 2017-Ohio-9192, 103 N.E.3d 1, ¶ 38. In doing so, the Ohio Supreme Court has promulgated a three-step analysis in determining a political subdivision's immunity from liability. *Cramer v. Auglaize Acres*, 113 Ohio St.3d 266, 2007-Ohio-1946, 865 N.E.2d 9, ¶ 14. However, whether a political subdivision *employee* acted with malicious purposes, in bad faith, or in a wanton or reckless manner generally is a question of fact. *Cannavino v. Rock Ohio Caesars Cleveland, L.L.C.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 103566, 2017-Ohio-380, 83 N.E.3d 354, ¶ 26. As such, summary judgment on

immunity (under R.C. 2744.03(A)(6)(b)) is proper unless reasonable minds can only conclude that the employee (in question) did not act willfully, wantonly, maliciously, recklessly, or in bad faith. *Argabrite v. Neer*, 149 Ohio St.3d 349, 2016-Ohio-8374, ¶ 15.

{¶61} In this case, I agree with the majority that in order for GSRVFD to be held liable, Knieriemen's conduct must be willful or wanton misconduct. Even though the "line between such misconduct and ordinary negligence is sometimes a fine one depending on the particular facts of a case, it is generally recognized that such issue is for the jury to decide." *Thompson v. Smith*, 178 Ohio App.3d 656, 2008-Ohio-5532, 899 N.E.2d 1040, ¶ 43 citing *Reynolds v. City of Oakwood*, 38 Ohio App.3d 125, 127, 528 N.E.2d 578 (2nd Dist.1987). "This issue should not be withheld from the jury where reasonable minds might differ as to the import of the evidence." *Id.* Nevertheless, I agree with the majority's determination that Knieriemen's conduct was not willful or wanton, as a matter of law, under the evidence presented. Thus, summary judgment should have been granted by the trial court to GSRVFD.

{¶62} However, the majority's determination that Knieriemen's conduct was not reckless, as a matter of law (thus entitling him to personal immunity) is flawed.

{¶63} To begin, the majority has mischaracterized crucial evidence by (seemingly) relying solely on Knieriemen's testimony. Even though the majority

asserts (that) Knieriemen checked all of the mirrors of the Brush 14 truck before backing (seeing no one), a genuine issue of fact exists as to whether or not the mirrors were capable of providing Knieriemen with a *clear* view of what was behind him due to the slope of the embankment (upon which the truck was parked) and the obstruction in the bed of the truck. The majority further asserts that Knieriemen's speed, while backing up, was "less than 5 m.p.h.," despite Knieriemen's contention that he did not know either how far he travelled (backing) or how fast the truck was moving while he was driving. (*See generally*, Knieriemen Dep. Tr. at 130).⁸

{¶64} I agree with the trial court's determination that a genuine issue of material fact exists as to whether or not Knieriemen's conduct was reckless. "The question of whether a person has acted recklessly is almost always a question for the jury." *Mashburn v. Dutcher*, 5th Dist. Delaware No. 12 CAE010003, 2012-Ohio-6283, 14 N.E.3d 383, ¶ 48 citing *Hunter v. Columbus*, 139 Ohio App.3d 962, 970, 746 N.E.2d 246 (10th Dist.2000). In the case before us, reasonable minds could differ whether Knieriemen's voluntary decision to back Brush 14 either up or down the reservoir embankment, unaided, with questionable visibility to the rear, knowing that at least five (5) people were behind him, was in fact reckless and not merely negligent.

⁸ In my review of Knieriemen's deposition, I note that he responded "I do not recall" or "I do not specifically recall" approximately 100 times. To this writer, credibility is a factor that should be considered.

Case No. 13-18-15

{¶65} For that reason, I would affirm the trial court's denial of summary judgment as to Knieriem.

{¶66} Therefore, I dissent.

SCANNED

FILED IN THE COURT OF APPEALS
SENECA COUNTY

NOV - 8 2018

JEAN A. ECKELBERRY, CLERK

**IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF OHIO
THIRD APPELLATE DISTRICT
SENECA COUNTY**

**PAUL RIEHM, ADMINISTRATOR
OF THE ESTATE OF LORRI J.
RIEHM, DECEASED,**

PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE,

CASE NO. 13-18-15

v.

**GREEN SPRINGS RURAL VOLUNTEER
FIRE DEPARTMENT, ET AL.,**

**JUDGMENT
ENTRY**

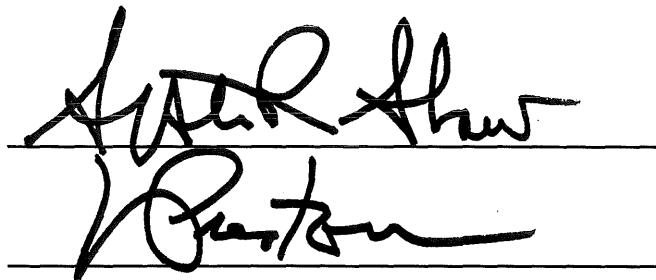
DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS.

This matter comes on for determination of Appellee's request for reconsideration of this Court's opinion and final judgment, and Appellants' memorandum in opposition to the request.

Upon consideration, the Court finds that the request of Appellee fails to raise any obvious error in this Court's decision or any issue not properly considered in the first instance. See *Garfield Hts. City School Dist. v. State Bd. of Edn.* (1992), 85 Ohio App.3d 117; *Columbus v. Hodge* (1987), 37 Ohio App.3d 68. Rather, Appellee's request raises the same issues and arguments that were fully and correctly addressed in the Court's decision. Accordingly, the request is not well taken.

Case No. 13-18-15

It is therefore **ORDERED** that Appellee's request for reconsideration be, and the same hereby is, denied.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John R. Bryant", is written over two horizontal lines. The signature is fluid and cursive, with "John" on the top line and "R. Bryant" on the bottom line.

JUDGES

DATED: November 6, 2018

/jlr

IN THE COMMON PLEAS COURT OF SENECA COUNTY, OHIO

PAUL L. RIEHM * Case No. 16-CV-0314

Administrator of the Estate of
Lorri J. Riehm, deceased *

Plaintiff, *

vs. * Judge Michael P. Kelbley

GREEN SPRINGS RURAL
VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT
et al., *

Defendants.

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COMMON PLEAS COURT
SENECA COUNTY, OHIO
JEAN A. ECKELBERRY
CLERK

JUDGMENT ENTRY

This action was submitted to the Court upon the Defendant Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department's Motion for Summary Judgment and Memorandum in Support Defendant Seth T. Knieriemen's Motion for Summary Judgment, Plaintiff's Consolidated Response in Opposition to Defendants' Motions for Summary Judgment, Defendant Seth Knieriemen's Reply in Support of Motion for Summary Judgment, and Defendant Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department's Reply in Support of Summary Judgment. Upon consideration of the Motions, the pleadings and other matters of record herein, Defendant Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department's Motion for Summary Judgment is **OVERRULED**. Defendant Seth Knieriemen's Motion for Summary Judgment is **OVERRULED**.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

Plaintiff Paul Riehm is the husband of Lorri Riehm, deceased, and has been appointed by the Seneca County Probate Court as the Administrator of her Estate. (Complaint ¶ 2). The Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department (R.V.F.D.) is a private, not-for-profit, corporation that offers fire and rescue services to area townships, including Adams Township.

(Complaint ¶ 14). Seth Knieriemen is a member of the Green Springs R.V.F.D. (Complaint ¶ 17).

The Beaver Creek Reservoir (the “Reservoir”) is a large up ground reservoir located in Adams Township, Seneca County, Ohio and owned and controlled by the City of Clyde. (Complaint ¶ 7). On June 28, 2016, Lorri Riehm told her husband, Paul, that she was going for a walk at the reservoir. (Complaint ¶ 12). That same evening, Knieriemen received an emergency dispatch over the radio. (Knieriemen Dep. at 51). The emergency dispatch called for assistance regarding a capsized boat on the reservoir. (Complaint ¶ 15; Knieriemen Dep. at 55).

Knieriemen answered the emergency dispatch and reported to the Green Springs Fire Station. (Knieriemen Dep. at 51, 55). Knieriemen rode in Brush 14, a Ford F-350 Super Duty, 4X4 pickup truck, to the reservoir with fellow firefighters, Mike Carter and Nick Frey. (Knieriemen Dep. at 59; Complaint ¶ 18). Brush 14 was equipped with a hitch to haul Green Springs’ rescue boat. (Stickles Dep. at 18-19; Carter Dep. at 21-26; Chief Greg Lowe Dep. at 15-16).

Brush 14 pulled the rescue boat to the reservoir. (Knieriemen Dep. at 59). When Knieriemen arrived at the reservoir, he helped launch the rescue boat from the east side of the reservoir, which was essentially the staging area and where the parking lot is located. (Complaint at ¶ 19).

The capsized boat was on the opposite side of the reservoir, i.e., the west side. (Complaint at ¶ 20). Firefighters Frey and Carter headed to the capsized boat in the rescue boat. (Frey Dep. at 22). Before they reached the capsized boaters, Frey radioed Fire Chief Greg Lowe that the rescue boat was running out of fuel. (Frey Dep. at 23; Complaint at ¶ 22). Chief Lowe directed Knieriemen to bring fuel to the rescue boat. (Knieriemen Dep. at 64; Complaint at ¶

23). The rescue boat uses a gas-oil mix, but Knieriemen had regular gas and had to return to the staging area to obtain the correct fuel. (Carter Dep. at 60; Complaint at ¶ 24).

After getting the proper fuel Knieriemen returned to the west side of the Reservoir and gave the gas container to Carter, who refueled the rescue boat. (Carter Dep. at 62; Knieriemen Dep. at 87). Green Springs still had to remove the capsized boat from the reservoir. (Lowe Aff. ¶ 6).

Knieriemen observed that Green Springs' Firefighters Cantu, Frey, and Stickles were attempting, without success, to secure the capsized boat with ropes. (Carter Dep. at 59. Complaint at ¶ 39). Knieriemen intended to use Brush 14 to pull the capsized boat out of the reservoir. (Complaint at ¶ 39). No one requested Knieriemen move or bring the truck back to the boat. (Stickles Dep. at 47).

Although all the firefighters were behind the truck, Knieriemen never told them he was backing up and they were not aware that he was backing up towards them. (Stickles Dep. at 39; Knieriemen Dep. at 122). Knieriemen backed up Brush 14 which still had its emergency flashers in operation. (Knieriemen Dep. at 106). He checked his rear view and two outside mirrors and saw no one. (Knieriemen Dep. at 103). However, Knieriemen knew the truck's rear-view mirror was almost completely obstructed by equipment in the back of the truck. (Knieriemen Dep. at 76). Despite this, he did not perform a 360 walk around of the vehicle before getting in and backing it up. (Plaintiff's Opposition, Ex. B, RFA # 44). Riehm was in the blind spot. (Knieriemen Aff. at ¶ 4).

Stickles, who observed the accident unfold, saw Riehm walking away from Brush 14 with her back to it while wearing headphones and looking down at her phone. (Stickles Dep. at 46-47). As Knieriemen was backing up Brush 14, he noticed that Stickles was waving and

yelling at him to stop so Knieriemen immediately stopped backing up. (Stickles Dep. at 38-39; Knieriemen Dep. at 130). Knieriemen exited the vehicle and realized he had struck Riehm. (Knieriemen Dep. at 135).

Knieriemen went to Riehm and checked for a response, but she showed no signs of life. (Knieriemen Dep. at 138; Knieriemen Aff. at ¶ 5). Carter performed an assessment of Riehm and was not able to get any kind of response from her. (Carter Dep. at 67). Cantu, who was performing CPR with Carter, likewise did not detect any signs of life or vital signs. (Cantu Dep. at 34).

An autopsy of Lorri was performed on June 30, 2016. See Green Springs RVFD's MSJ, Ex. E. The autopsy determined that Lorri had blunt force injuries to her right leg, hands, abdomen, thorax, and head. *Id.* She had multiple fractures to her ribs and sternum; contusions and lacerations of her lungs, and a hinge skull fracture. *Id.* The cause of death was listed as multiple blunt force trauma. *Id.* The coroner determined that the death occurred within minutes from the initial injury. *Id.*

LEGAL ANALYSIS

The appropriateness of rendering summary judgment pursuant to Civ. R. 56 requires the moving party to demonstrate that: (1) there is no genuine issue as to any material fact; (2) that the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law; and (3) that reasonable minds can come to but one conclusion, and that conclusion is adverse to the party against whom the motion for summary judgment is made, who is entitled to have the evidence construed most strongly in his favor. *Harless v. Willis Day Co.*, 54 Ohio St.2d 64, 66, 375 N.E.2d 46 (1978).

In order to prevail on its motion for summary judgment, the moving party bears the initial burden of identifying those portions of the pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories,

and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any,' which it believes demonstrate the absence of a genuine issue of material fact. *Dresher v. Burt*, 75 Ohio St. 3d 280, 288, 662 N.E.2d 264 (1996). The non-moving party has the reciprocal burden to set forth specific facts showing there is a genuine issue for trial. Civ.R. 56(E).

Defendants Green Springs RVFD and Knieriemen move for summary judgment on the basis of political subdivision immunity. In Ohio, courts apply a three-tiered analysis to determine whether a political subdivision is entitled to immunity under R.C. Chapter 2744. *State ex rel. Rohrs. v. Germann*, 3rd Dist. Henry No. 7-12-21, 2013-Ohio-2497, ¶ 28. "First, the court must determine whether the entity claiming immunity is a political subdivision and whether the alleged harm occurred in connection with either a governmental or a proprietary function." *Plank v. City of Bellefontaine*, 3rd Dist. No. 8-17-18, 2017-Ohio-8623, ¶ 11, citing R.C. 2744.02(A)(1); *Brady v. Bucyrus Police Dept.*, 194 Ohio App.3d 574, 2011-Ohio-2460, 957 N.E.2d 339, ¶ 44 (3rd Dist.).

This court must determine whether the Green Springs RVFD is a political subdivision and whether Lorri's alleged harm occurred in connection with either a governmental or proprietary function. The Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department (R.V.F.D.) is a private, not-for- profit corporation that offers fire and rescue services to area townships, including Adams Township. (Complaint ¶ 17). R.C. 9.60(F) states

[a] private fire company * * * providing service pursuant to this section to a governmental entity in this state * * * has the same immunities and defenses in a civil action that a political subdivision has under section 2744.02 of the Revised Code. The employees of such a fire company * * * have the same immunities and defenses in a civil action that employees of a political subdivision have under section 2744.03 of the Revised Code.

Based upon R.C. 9.60, the Green Springs RVFD is a private fire company entitled to the same immunities extended to political subdivisions by virtue of R.C. 2744.01.

The next thing to determine, in the first tier analysis, is whether the alleged harm occurred in connection with a government or proprietary function. Governmental function includes, but is not limited to “[t]he provision or nonprovision of police, fire, emergency medical, ambulance, and rescue services or protection.” R.C. 2744.01(C)(2)(a). Plaintiff argues that Green Springs RVFD was not contractually engaged in the provision of “fire protection” for a governmental entity. (Brief in Opposition at p. 18). However, R.C. 9.60 does not restrict the company to providing “fire protection.” Rather, the statute states “a private fire company * * * providing service.” R.C. 9.60(F). Furthermore, the provision of fire * * * and rescue services qualifies as a governmental function under R.C. 2744.01(C)(2)(a). The court finds that the harm Lorri incurred was in connection to a governmental function. Therefore, the Green Springs RVFD is a private fire company entitled to the same immunities extended to political subdivisions by virtue of R.C. 2744.01.

Next, the court must determine whether any of the exceptions in 2744.02(B) apply to deprive Green Springs RVFD of the general grant of immunity. Plaintiff argues that even if it concedes that a presumption of immunity is conferred for the provision of fire services, there is an express exception to immunity that re-exposes Green Springs RVFD to liability. Specifically, under R.C. 2744.01(B)(1), Green Springs RVFD is liable for injury, death, or loss to person or property caused by the negligent operation of any motor vehicle by their employee when the employee is engaged within the scope of their employment and authority. (Plaintiff’s Brief in Opposition p. 20). While 2744.01(B)(1) imposes liability upon the defendants for the negligent operation of a motor vehicle, there are full defenses available to them.

In this matter, 2744.01(B)(1)(b) provides a full defense to the liability if “[a] member of a municipal corporation fire department or any other firefighting agency was operating a motor vehicle while engaged in duty at a fire, proceeding toward a place where a fire is in progress or is believed to be in progress, or answering any other emergency alarm and the operation of the vehicle did not constitute willful or wanton misconduct.” Thus, if defendant Knieriemen was still answering the emergency alarm and the operation of the vehicle did not constitute willful or wanton misconduct, Green Springs will not be liable for Lorri’s injuries.

Defendant Knieriemen is entitled to immunity, as an employee of a political subdivision, if he satisfies the requirements of R.C. 2744.03(A)(6). That section of the Revised Code affords immunity to an employee of a political subdivision unless one of the following applies:

- (a) The employee’s acts or omissions were manifestly outside the scope of the employee’s employment or official responsibilities;
- (b) The employee’s acts or omissions were with malicious purpose, in bad faith or in a wanton or reckless manner;
- (c) Civil liability is expressly imposed upon the employee by a section of the Revised Code.

R.C. 2744.01(B) defines an employee as “an officer, agent, employee, or servant, whether or not compensated or full-time or part-time, who is authorized to act and is acting within the scope of the officer’s, agent’s, employee’s, or servant’s employment for a political subdivision.” Knieriemen satisfied the statutory definition of an employee on June 28, 2016.

Knieriemen was also acting within the course and scope of his employment at the time of the accident. He voluntarily reported to the Green Springs fire station. (Knieriemen Dep. at 51). He was acting under the direction of Chief Greg Lowe. (Knieriemen Dep. at 64). Knieriemen was assisting in an active emergency scene at the time of the accident. (Knieriemen Dep. at 106-

107; Lowe Aff. at ¶¶ 6-7). Thus Knieriemen was engaged in the course and scope of his employment with Green Springs on June 28, 2016. Since defendant Knieriemen was an employee of Green Springs and was acting within the scope and course of his employment on June 28, 2016, he is entitled to immunity unless his acts were with malicious purpose, in bad faith, or in a wanton or reckless manner.

Defendants Green Springs RVFD and Knieriemen argue that Knieriemen's actions were not willful, wanton, or reckless. Green Springs RVFD would be liable for Lorri's injuries if Knieriemen's actions were willful or wanton. See R.C. 2744.01(B)(1)(b). Knieriemen would be liable for Lorri's injuries if his actions were wanton or reckless. See R.C. 2744.03(A)(6)(b). Defendants argue that there are no genuine issues of material fact that demonstrate Knieriemen's actions on June 28, 2016 were wanton, willful, or reckless. Plaintiff argues that defendant Knieriemen acted in a wanton or reckless manner and therefore both defendants remain liable for the injuries caused to Lorri.

The Ohio Supreme Court in *Anderson v. Massillon*, 134 Ohio St.3d 380, 2012-Ohio-5711, 983 N.E.2d 266, held that "the terms 'willful,' 'wanton,' and 'reckless' describe different and distinct degrees of care and are not interchangeable, for purposes of statutes relating to defense available to a political subdivision and to immunity for employees of political subdivisions." The Court noted that the cross-application of the terms in caselaw led appellate courts to reach the conclusion that the "willful," "wanton," and "reckless" standards were functionally equivalent. *Id.* at ¶ 30. The Court went on to disavow the dicta contained in *Thompson v. McNeill*, 53 Ohio St.3d 102, 104, 559 N.E.2d 705, fn. 1, that "willfulness," "wantonness," and recklessness" are equivalent standards and defined each term. *Anderson* at ¶ 31.

“Willful misconduct implies an intentional deviation from a clear duty or from a definite rule of conduct, a deliberate purpose not to discharge some duty necessary to safety, or purposefully doing wrongful acts with knowledge or appreciation of the likelihood of resulting injury.” *Anderson*, at ¶ 32, citing *Tighe v. Diamond*, 149 Ohio St. 520, 527, 80 N.E.2d 122; *see also Black's Law Dictionary* 1630 (8th Ed.2004) (describing willful conduct as the voluntary or intentional violation or disregard of a known legal duty).

“Wanton misconduct is the failure to exercise any care toward those to whom a duty of care is owed in circumstances in which there is great probability that harm will result.” *Anderson* at ¶33, citing *Hawkins v. Ivy*, 50 Ohio St.2d 114, 117–118, 363 N.E.2d 367; *see also Black's Law Dictionary* 1613–1614 (8th Ed.2004) (explaining that one acting in a wanton manner is aware of the risk of the conduct but is not trying to avoid it and is indifferent to whether harm results).

“Reckless conduct is characterized by the conscious disregard of or indifference to a known or obvious risk of harm to another that is unreasonable under the circumstances and is substantially greater than negligent conduct.” *Anderson*, 134 Ohio St.3d 380, 2012-Ohio-5711, 983 N.E.2d 266, at ¶ 34, citing *Thompson*, 53 Ohio St.3d at 104–105, 559 N.E.2d 705, adopting 2 Restatement of the Law 2d, Torts, Section 500, at 587 (1965); *see also Black's Law Dictionary* 1298–1299 (8th Ed.2004) (explaining that reckless conduct is characterized by a substantial and unjustifiable risk of harm to others and a conscious disregard of or indifference to the *risk*, but the actor does not desire harm).

There is a genuine issue of material fact regarding whether Knieriemens actions were wanton, willful, or reckless on June 28, 2016. Defendant Knieriemens knew there were pedestrians at the reservoir. (Plaintiff's Opposition p. 23). He knew the truck had obstructed

visibility out the rear. (Knieriemen Dep. at 76). He knew there were at least five (5) individuals behind the truck, yet he never advised anyone he was backing up; did not activate the siren or honk the horn to alert people. (Stickles Dep. at 39; Knieriemen Dep. at 122). He never did a walk around of the vehicle to check that it was clear. (Plaintiff's Opposition, Ex. B, RFA #44). He never requested a spotter. (Plaintiff's Opposition p. 23). He had access to a radio and never asked for ground guidance. (*Id.*). When asked why, he claimed there was no purpose in using a radio. (Knieriemen Dep. at 122). He claimed that providing assistance in backing up a vehicle "is not a common practice" and he presumes the people behind him are watching out for him. (*Id.* at 127).

Defendants Green Springs RVFD and Knieriemen argue that Knieriemen checked his three mirrors before backing up and didn't see anyone. (Knieriemen Dep. at 103, 129-130). The emergency flashers were already on. (*Id.*). He then proceeded slowly, and did not even push the throttle down. (*Id.*). Reasonable minds could come to different conclusions regarding whether defendant Knieriemen's actions were wanton, willful, or reckless. Accordingly, summary judgment is not appropriate in this matter on the issue of political subdivision immunity.

Plaintiff also filed a survival action pursuant to R.C. 2305.21. Defendants argue that summary judgment is appropriate because the evidence establishes that Riehm died instantly and did not experience any conscious pain and suffering. The Ohio Supreme Court stated:

Physical or bodily pain and suffering in consequence of a wrong occasioning an injury to the person is a proper element of damages, but allowance can be made only for pain and suffering of which the injured person is rendered conscious, and damages for pain during the time the injured person is unconscious are not allowable.

Flory v. New York Central Railroad Co., 170 Ohio St. 185, 163 N.E. 2d 902 (1959). After the accident, Knieriemen immediately went to Riehm and checked for a response but she showed no

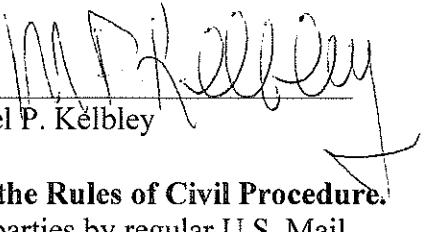
signs of life. (Knieriemen Dep. at 138). Mr. Carter performed an assessment of Riehm and was not able to get any kind of response from her. (Carter Dep. at 67). Mr. Cantu, performed CPR with Carter, likewise did not detect any signs of life or vital signs. (Cantu Dep. at 34).

Plaintiff argues that an award of conscious pain and suffering is appropriate if the decedent was not completely unconscious during the interval between injury and death. In support or same, Dr. Felo's written report states that the injuries "were not immediately fatal" and that Riehm could have "been conscious up until the fracture of the skull occurred." However, he could not offer an opinion as to how quickly the fracture of the skull occurred. (Felo Dep. at 34).

Plaintiff argues that an award of conscious pain and suffering is appropriate where the decedent only survived for seconds. See *Wilburn v. Cleveland Elec. Illum. Co.* 74 Ohio App.3d 401, 412, 599 N.E.2d 301, 308 (1991). Plaintiff buttresses this argument with the following facts: Lorri was seen walking; she was seen being knocked down by the truck; she was seen being caught under the truck and the tires running up her body, spine, and then crushing her head. (Plaintiff's Opposition p. 26). Based upon the foregoing, reasonable minds could come to different conclusions regarding conscious pain and suffering and summary judgment is not appropriate on the issue of the survival claim.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons Defendant Green Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Department's and Defendant Seth Knieriemen's Motions for Summary Judgment are **OVERRULED**.



Judge Michael P. Kelsley

TO THE PARTIES:

This is a final appealable order pursuant to Rule 54 of the Rules of Civil Procedure.
TO THE CLERK: Please furnish a copy of the foregoing to the parties by regular U.S. Mail.