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# Hartford Jury Awards \$236,520 to Dancer Injured in Car Crash

Aspiring dancer Alejandro Cruz injured his back after the car he was driving in was rear-ended. A jury recently awarded him \$236,520.

By Robert Storace | June 07, 2018

An aspiring professional dancer who had to curtail his career following a rear-end collision in which he suffered serious back injuries has been awarded \$236,520 by a jury.

The six-person Hartford Superior Court jury heard testimony and saw evidence of how Alejandro Cruz's career as a dance instructor was affected by the accident. That played a significant role in the jury's verdict to award damages, according to Cruz's attorney, [Sabrina Copp](https://dresslerlaw.com/the-firm/sabrina-copp.html) (<https://dresslerlaw.com/the-firm/sabrina-copp.html>).



**Photo: Taras Mikhailyuk/Shutterstock.com**

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Cruz taught Krumping, a high-intensity, freestyle dance, to older teenagers and adults.

"I do think the before and after videos of his dancing had an effect on the jury," said Copp, an associate with Hartford's Dressler Strickland. "He did show the jury how his movements and execution of movements were different from before the accident and after the accident. Showing the jury his dance moves humanized him."

The trial lasted two days and the jury deliberated for two hours on May 18 before issuing its ruling awarding the \$236,520 in noneconomic damages. The defense did not appeal the case to the Connecticut Appellate Court within the 20-day time frame.

Cruz, a 26-year-old Hartford resident, sustained a lumbar sprain and neck and back pain after the Honda Accord he was driving in on Willard Avenue in Newington was rear-ended by a Dodge Caravan driven by Nora Sharkey, according to a lawsuit (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l0Ziel1tR-XH7xHzfEqGGOBVEPZZjaeJ/view?usp=sharing>) filed in December 2016. The accident occurred in December 2015. Sharkey was given a ticket for following too closely.

Copp said Cruz did not seek medical attention at the scene, but sought care at Hartford Hospital for his pain a week later. Cruz ended up being treated by a chiropractor for four months due to the intense back pain, Copp said.

Copp believes Cruz's personal story helped cement the case for the jury.

"I think they were compelled by the fact that growing up, he had a disability," Copp said. "He was hearing impaired and was never really able to connect with the outside world and never felt normal until he discovered dance. He performs all movements without hearing music."

Copp noted the effects of the accident forced Cruz to turn down an internship at a dance school in Los Angeles. She said Cruz still teaches dance today, but is limited in what he can teach.

"He now only teaches beginners with little kids. He is not able to do the more elaborate dance. Today, his back still bothers him and he continues to have neck pain," Copp said.

The last defense offer made before trial was for \$12,500.

Sharkey and Liberty Mutual were represented by Matthias DeAngelo, of Wallingford-based Meehan, Roberts, Turret & Rosenbaum. DeAngelo declined to comment Thursday.

In [court filings \(https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xM\\_jPO7gSfxGN9d9ky1B\\_F3fslare8-b/view?usp=sharing\)](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xM_jPO7gSfxGN9d9ky1B_F3fslare8-b/view?usp=sharing), the defense noted that Sharkey initially denied liability, but then amended her answer to admit liability. The defense requested that the initial admission of liability not be introduced at trial. Judge Jane School granted that request.

At the time, the defense wrote: “Any such evidence would be irrelevant and immaterial to the case, and the admissibility of such evidence would lead us down a slippery slope violating the attorney/client privilege and the case law of this state. Preclusion of said evidence from trial is appropriate as any such evidence would only serve to distract the jury from the true issues at trial which are causation and damages.”