

# Tesla must pay quarter of a BILLION dollars to family of woman killed after Model S driver crashed into her while bending down to pick up his phone

By [SOPHIE GABLE, US REPORTER](#)

**Tesla** has been forced to fork out almost \$250 million to the family of a **woman who was killed** when a Model S vehicle **struck her and her boyfriend while on Autopilot**. Naibel Benavides Leon, who was 22, died from the impact, while her partner, Dillon Angulo, suffered serious injuries during the crash in Key Largo, **Florida**, in April 2019. The driver, George McGee, admitted that he was bending down to pick up his phone before the electric vehicle smashed into the couple's parked car.

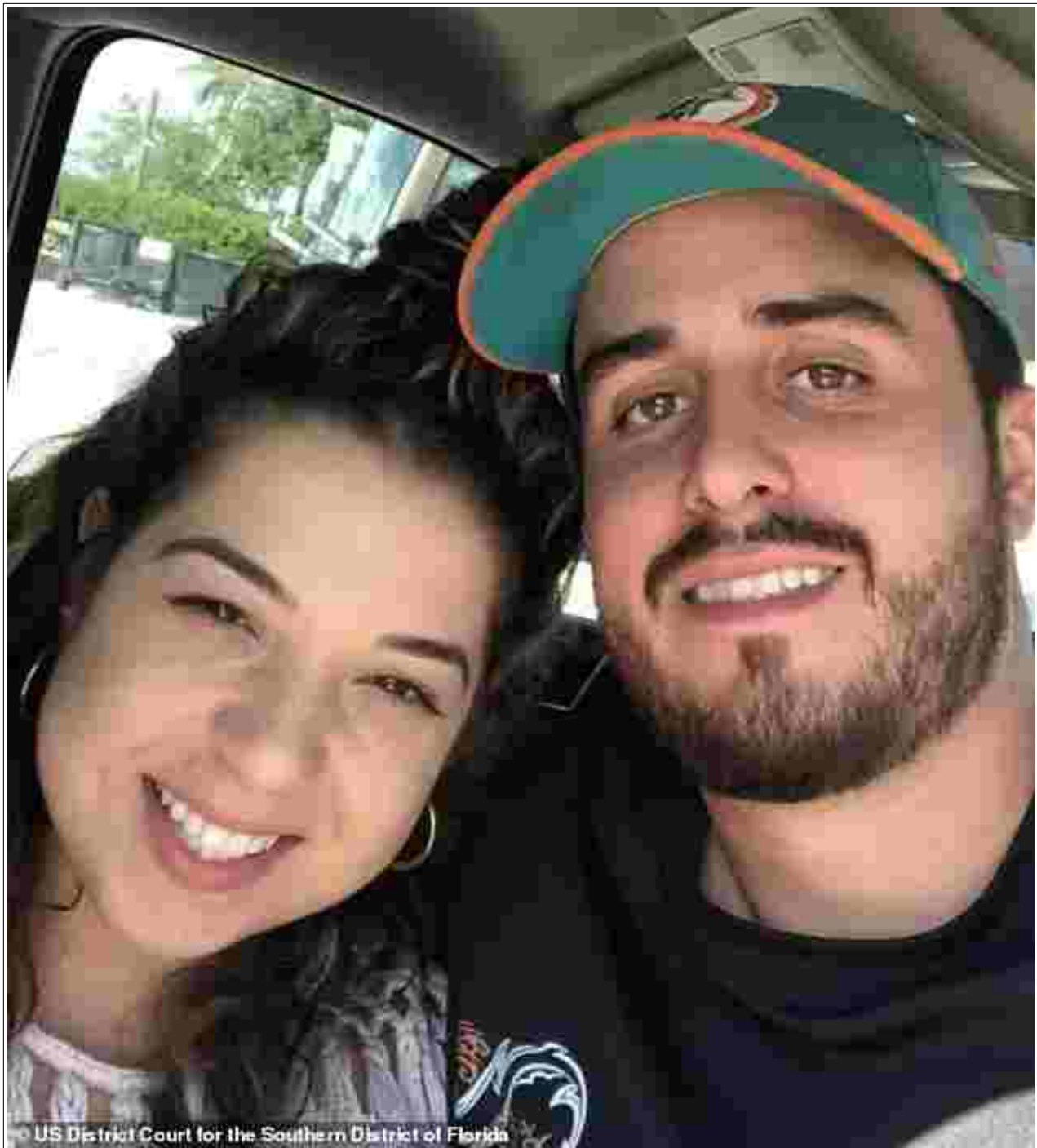
However, McGee said his 2019 Tesla Model S was driving in 'Autopilot,' and the **car's feature failed to brake** before the fatal collision.

Benavides Leon's family sued Tesla and the driver, but their case was consolidated with a criminal indictment in 2024 and moved to federal court with a jury.

The trial marked a setback for **Elon Musk's** vision of advancing self-driving cars and contributed to a precedent for holding vehicle manufacturers accountable.

Jurors **ruled in favor of the family last August**, but attorneys for Tesla filed a motion for a new trial, arguing there was not enough evidence to support the assertion that the car's Autopilot function caused the crash.

However, US District Judge Beth Bloom upheld the jury's decision on Friday, awarding \$200,000,000 to be split between Angulo and Benavides Leon's family, with an additional \$19,470,000 to Benavides Leon's family, and \$19,470,000 to Angulo.



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**Naibel Benavides Leon, 22, pictured left, was killed in the crash. Her boyfriend, Dillion Angulo, pictured right, survived with significant injuries**

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**A devastating crash in 2019 claimed the life of a young woman and altered a young man's life forever. A Tesla, pictured above after the collision, smashed into the couple's parked car**

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**Angulo (far right) and Benavides Leon's family sued the Tesla driver, George McGee, and Tesla for the incident. McGee settled but the lawsuit against Tesla went to trial last year. Angulo is pictured with Naibel Benavides Leon, his girlfriend's sister, outside of court**



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Bloom said the evidence presented in last year's trial supported the jury's decision that Tesla was in part at fault for the crash.

The judge's decision has finally closed the years-long case that has plagued a grieving family since the devastating accident.

The horror evening unfolded when Benavides Leon and Angulo pulled over on the side of the road to watch the stars near Key Largo, Florida on April 25, 2019.

McGee was driving his Tesla, and video footage from the car's front camera showed him blowing through a red light at nearly 70mph.

McGee then crashed into the couple's parked vehicle, throwing Benavides Leon 75 feet. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

Angulo broke multiple bones and suffered a traumatic brain injury. He attended the trial against Tesla and walked into the courtroom with a limp.

In a **60 Minutes interview** from October, Angulo recalled the harrowing moments of the crash.

He said he could not even speak to paramedics when they arrived, adding that he 'should've been dead' from his injuries.





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**Attorneys for the family argued that Tesla's Autopilot feature contributed to the crash. The company's representation disputed that claim, arguing that Autopilot does not prevent reckless driving. Angulo is pictured August setting up a roadside memorial for his girlfriend**



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**A federal judge reaffirmed the massive payout on Friday. The decision marks a potential setback in Tesla CEO Elon Musk's vision for driving automation. Pictured above is a file photo of Tesla Model S vehicles**

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Lawyers for Angulo and Benavides Leon argued that the Tesla McGee was driving was not fully tested for safety and 'was not designed to be used on roadways with cross-traffic or intersections,' the lawsuit states.

Plaintiffs **cited 56 alleged incidents of issues with the Autopilot** system, arguing: 'Tesla chose to continue profiting from the sales of their defective vehicles and software systems rather than heed warnings from government agencies, experts, and other car companies.'

'While McGee was reaching for his phone, the vehicle detected a stop sign, a stop bar, the road's edge, a pedestrian, and a parked Chevrolet Tahoe, but the Vehicle did not provide McGee with any audio alert or other warning of the obstacles and never engaged its emergency brakes,' court documents said.

'Shortly after the crash, McGee called 911, telling the operator: "Oh my God, I wasn't looking," "I don't know what happened. I ended up missing the turn. I was looking down," and "I dropped my phone. Oh my God,"' the document added.



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**Angulo suffered a traumatic brain injury and several broken bones from the crash. He spoke about the harrowing night in an interview with 60 Minutes Australia and is pictured above in a wheelchair after the accident**



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**Angulo recalled the fateful night in an interview with 60 Minutes Australia last October, pictured above**

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McGee told officers that he had been using the Autopilot feature and expected it to avoid the crash.

He testified in the trial last July, telling the jury that he thought Autopilot would assist him if he made a mistake, the [New York Times](#) reported at the time.

'It didn't warn me of the car and the individuals and hit the brakes,' McGee added.

A separate civil suit was filed against McGee, but the Tesla driver previously settled with Angulo and his girlfriend's family.

Lawyers for Tesla argued that Autopilot does not prevent 'reckless drivers.' Defense attorney Joel Smith argued in his opening statement: 'He's rummaging around for his phone and he runs through the intersection.'

'This can happen in any car, at any time. This is not about Autopilot.'



**Benavides Leon lost her life in the crash. She was sitting in a parked car admiring the stars when the Tesla struck her vehicle**

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**Tesla CEO Elon Musk has boasted about the car's Autopilot features. The recent decision affirming evidence supporting the feature's shortcomings presents an obstacle for Tesla's goal of automation. Musk is pictured at the US-Saudi Investment Forum in November**

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The case represents a significant obstacle in Musk's vision for revolutionizing self-driving cars.

Lawyers with the firm, [Wood Smith Henning Berman](#), called the case 'one of the largest products liability verdicts ever rendered against an automaker in Florida.'

An attorney representing Angulo and Benavides Leon's family said in a statement to the [Star Advertiser](#) that his clients were happy with the court's decision to affirm the payout.

'From day one, Tesla has refused to accept responsibility. Autopilot was defective, and Tesla put it on American roads before it was ready and before it was safe,' the statement read.