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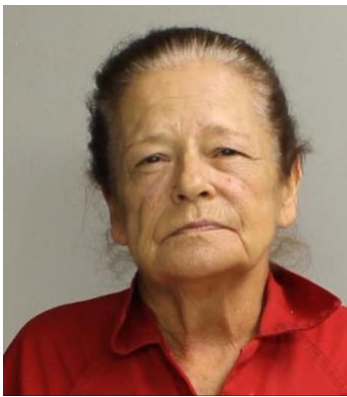
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **CHARGES UPGRADED TO 3<sup>RD</sup> DEGREE MURDER IN I-76 CRASH THAT KILLED FIREFIGHTER, INJURED OTHER FIRST RESPONDERS**



**JACQUELINE WALKER**

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (Oct. 5, 2021) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele and Pennsylvania State Police Captain James B. Kemm announce that new charges, including Third-Degree Murder, were filed against Jacqueline Walker, 63, of Little Egg Harbor, N.J., related to the July 24, 2021 crash on westbound Interstate 76. That crash killed Lower Merion Firefighter Thomas Royds and injured two other firefighters and a state trooper who were working on the berm area at the scene of a previous crash. The new charges come after the Pennsylvania State Police and Montgomery County Detective Bureau joint investigation of the crash and Walker's behavior leading up to it revealed new information.

The crash occurred at 3:23 a.m., Saturday, July 24, 2021 on westbound Interstate 76 at mile marker 335, which is in between the Gladwyne exit and PA 23 (Conshohocken) exit. Pennsylvania State Police and Belmont Hills Fire Company were called to the area less than 20 minutes prior at 3:06 a.m. for a crash between two cars (Chevrolet Malibu and Nissan Altima). The two cars were on the berm of the highway, while the fire truck—with all of its emergency lights activated— was parked in the right-hand travel lane and the marked State Police vehicle was in the same lane in front of the fire truck. There were orange cones in place behind the fire truck

that directed traffic into the left-hand travel lane of I-76. Emergency personnel were on the paved roadway and the berm between the fire truck and the two cars involved in the original crash. Vehicles were moving through the emergency response area at approximately 10 mph in the left-hand travel lane.

At 3:23 a.m., the Jeep Grand Cherokee, driven by Walker, was travelling in the right-hand travel lane as she approached the emergency response area, then drove over the rumble strips that demark the travel lane and berm, drove on the berm and plowed at a high rate of speed into four emergency responders, killing one and severely injuring three. Her vehicle then squarely hit the rear-end of the Nissan Altima, driving her Jeep's front end into the Nissan's trunk and pushing both cars 30 feet before coming to a stop.

The ensuing crash investigation and reconstruction found that the 2004 Jeep was in poor condition overall with severe rusting and other deficits. But more important was the fact that three of the four brakes on the Jeep were not functional, and previous records and evidence revealed that she knew about the brake system deficit, yet she declined to fix the brakes and continued to drive the Jeep. Additionally, there was no evidence of any pre-impact evasive steering by Walker. Rather, she continued to drive straight into and through the firefighters and state trooper, ultimately colliding with the black Nissan Altima.

Toxicology tests conducted on Walker's blood showed no alcohol or drug impairment. The crash investigation determined that the overall poor condition of her vehicle and the continued operation of this vehicle with the failing condition of the brake system was a major contributing factor to the crash that killed Firefighter Royds and injured the other first responders.

"While the defendant was taken into custody at the scene of the crash, that was just the beginning of the investigation. Our extensive investigation found that Walker operated her vehicle despite knowing that her brakes were not in functioning order, operating her vehicle in such an extreme reckless manner that she plowed through an active, well-marked emergency response area, severely injuring three first responders and killing another first responder, leading us to add the third-degree murder charge," said DA Steele. "Our investigation also led us to withdraw the Homicide by Vehicle-DUI charges after the toxicology tests found that she was not impaired with drugs or alcohol."

PSP Captain Kemm noted the horrific nature of the crash. "This tragedy strikes all first responders to our core. It is one of our greatest fears, to be hurt or severely injured while we are assisting others," said Kemm. "I would like to thank the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, the Belmont Hills Fire Company and specifically MCDB Det. Rob Turner and PSP Sgt. Charles Burckhardt for their tireless efforts in investigating this horrific event."

Walker, who has been at the Montgomery County Correctional Facility on \$500,000 cash bail since the crash, is now charged with Third-Degree Murder, Homicide by Vehicle, four counts of Aggravated Assault by Vehicle, nine counts of Recklessly Endangering Another Person, Reckless Driving and related charges. She was arraigned today by Magisterial District Judge Henry Schireson, who declined to set bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m., Oct. 14, 2021 before Judge Schireson.

The case will be prosecuted by District Attorney Kevin R. Steele and Chief of Trials Thomas W. McGoldrick.

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele

*CRIMINAL CHARGES, AND ANY DISCUSSION THEREOF, ARE MERELY ALLEGATIONS AND ALL DEFENDANTS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL AND UNLESS PROVEN GUILTY.*