

# Toyota sued for wrongful death

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An out-of-control 2002 Toyota Land Cruiser accelerated suddenly and killed a Kansas City woman waiting for her car at a Grandview car wash last year, alleges a lawsuit filed last week in Jackson County Circuit Court.

The lawsuit was filed Thursday by the two children of 40-year-old Rosland Watson against Toyota Motor Sales USA and Grandview Auto Wash. Todd E. Hilton and Eric L. Dirks, both of Stueve Siegel and Hanson, represent the plaintiffs.

According to the suit, Watson was outside sitting on a bench on an “unseasonably sunny and warm November afternoon” while her Pontiac was being dried off. Another customer, John Page, was driving the Land Cruiser through the automatic car wash when it sped up without warning, hit Watson’s vehicle, then hit Watson and another customer. Watson was rushed to the hospital, but she died later the same day. Page is also named as a defendant.

The suit alleges Toyota was aware of the unintended acceleration defect since at least 2002 but instead of dealing with it, concealed the problem, blaming faulty floor mats and sticky pedals. The suit also alleges Toyota “staged an inspection” of Page’s vehicle in order to clear the company’s name and blame the driver.

“Toyota sympathizes with anyone affected by an accident involving a Toyota vehicle,” company spokeswoman Celeste Migliore said in a written statement. “Because we have not had a chance to review the lawsuit it would not be appropriate to comment at this time nor to speculate about the circumstances or cause of the accident.”

The Grandview Auto Wash is owned by U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a Democrat who represents portions of Cass and Jackson counties. Efforts to reach Cleaver were unsuccessful.

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