

One Year After Texas Supreme Court's Werner Ruling, Truck Crash Victims Face a Transformed Legal Landscape

Board-Certified Attorney Paul Cannon says Bifurcated trials, a landmark \$90 million reversal, & failed reform bills have rewritten rules for 18-wheeler cases

HOUSTON, TX, UNITED STATES, July 9, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- One year ago, the Texas Supreme Court reversed a \$90 million verdict against Werner Enterprises in a 5-3 decision, one of the most consequential trucking rulings in state history. Houston attorney Paul Cannon, Board Certified in Personal Injury Trial Law, says the anniversary is a reminder that families injured in commercial truck crashes now navigate a legal landscape most Texans have never heard of.

The stakes are not abstract. Texas recorded 39,393 crashes involving commercial motor vehicles in 2024, including 546 fatal crashes that killed 608 people, according to TxDOT's Commercial Motor Vehicle Involved Crashes and Injuries by County report. Harris County led every county in the state with 6,313 commercial vehicle crashes and 41 deaths. Nationally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported 5,340 people killed in crashes involving large trucks in 2024, most of them occupants of the smaller vehicles.

Three legal shifts now shape these cases, Cannon says. First, since Sept. 1, 2021, House Bill 19 has required most commercial vehicle lawsuits to be tried in two phases, with evidence about a trucking company's hiring, training, and safety history generally reserved for the second phase.

Second, the Werner ruling raised the bar for holding carriers liable when the court views a crash as a circumstance rather than negligence.

Third, lawmakers in 2025 considered Senate Bill 30, which would have allowed judges to reduce jury awards above \$1 million in wrongful death cases and \$250,000 in personal injury cases, and Senate Bill 39, which targeted trucking litigation directly. Both bills failed, and their supporters have said they will try again when the Legislature convenes on Jan. 12, 2027.

"Nothing in these changes closed the courthouse doors, but they added hurdles to getting there," Cannon said. "A truck case in 2026 is not a car case with a bigger vehicle. Who can be held responsible, and how, is a technical question from day one."

Cannon notes that responsibility in a commercial truck crash may extend beyond the driver to

the motor carrier, freight brokers, cargo loaders, and maintenance providers, and that federal safety regulations often determine how fault is established. Because critical evidence, such as electronic logs, dash camera footage, and maintenance records, sits in the trucking company's hands, he says preservation demands should be sent within days of a crash, not months.

About Simmons and Fletcher, P.C.

Simmons and Fletcher, P.C. is a personal injury law firm founded in 1979 and headquartered at 9821 Katy Freeway, Suite 590, Houston, Texas. The firm is led by President Sharon Simmons-Cantrell and partners Christopher K. Fletcher and Paul H. Cannon, who is Board Certified in Personal Injury Trial Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. The firm exclusively represents injury victims in Houston, Katy, Cypress, Sugar Land, and across Texas.

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