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Blotter

## Driver inattentiveness cited in crash that killed corrections officer

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By Freeman staff

TOWN OF ULSTER — A driver taking her eyes off the road to adjust the heat in her car appears to have caused the crash on the Thruway that killed a state corrections officer, police said on Saturday.

A press release from the state police said the action by the driver, a woman whose name was not provided, caused her car to drift from the passing lane to the driving lane of the highway and strike a state prison van about 1:35 p.m. Friday.

The collision, near mile marker 94.3 on the northbound side of the highway, just north of the Kingston exit, caused both vehicles to go off the right side of the road and down an embankment, police said.

The prison van overturned, killing the driver, Corrections Officer Casimiro Pomales, 52, of Kerhonkson, and injuring the two passengers — Corrections Officer John Minuck and inmate Ralph Ambert, who was being driven from the Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch to an eye doctor's appointment in Albany. Neither Minuck nor Ambert, 40, who is serving a life sentence for murder, was seriously hurt.

The car, a Mercury Sable, did not overturn, and the unidentified driver and her passenger were not seriously hurt, police said. State police Investigator John Kelly said on Friday that the occupants of the car are from Warwick and that it did not appear the driver would be charged.

Pomales, who was known by friends as Maxi, worked at Eastern for more than 22 years.

"Maxi was a great guy," Ricardo Ronda, a friend of Pomales' for about 10 years, said on Saturday. "Everyone I knew loved him, and he will be missed."

A reader who posted a comment on the Freeman's website on Saturday thanked Ponmales for "years of service keeping us safe."

In a prepared statement issued Friday afternoon, state Correctional Services Commissioner Brian Fischer said he extends his "profound sadness and heartfelt condolences" to Pomales' family.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo late Friday ordered flags on state office buildings flown at half-staff in Pomales' honor.

Funeral arrangements for Pomales are pending at the George J. Moylan Funeral Home in Rosendale, Ronda said.

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