

No. 1-12-2256

IN THE  
APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS  
FIRST DISTRICT

<p>PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS,  Plaintiff-Appellee,  -vs-  MICHAEL COLEMAN,  Defendant-Appellant.</p>	<p>Appeal from the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois  11MC5000662-01  Honorable Russell Hartigan, Judge Presiding.</p>
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BRIEF AND ARGUMENT FOR DEFENDANT-APPELLANT

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ORAL ARGUMENT REQUESTED

I. MICHAEL COLEMAN’S CONVICTION FOR LEAVING THE SCENE OF AN ACCIDENT MUST BE REVERSED BECAUSE HE WAS NOT PROVED GUILTY BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT UNDER THE CORPUS DELICTI RULE; THE TRIAL JUDGE’S RULING TO THE CONTRARY RESTS UPON A MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE ELEMENTS OF LEAVING THE SCENE OF AN ACCIDENT, AS WELL AS UPON HEARSAY WHICH THE PROSECUTION HAD REPRESENTED, AND WHICH THE TRIAL JUDGE HAD RULED, WAS NOT BEING ADMITTED FOR ITS TRUTH .....9

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## NATURE OF THE CASE

Michael Coleman was charged with driving under the influence, leaving the scene of an accident, and fleeing and eluding. After a bench trial the trial court judge acquitted Michael Coleman of driving under the influence, but convicted him of leaving the scene of an accident and fleeing and eluding. He was sentenced to one year of supervision.

This is a direct appeal from the judgment of the court below. No issue is raised challenging the charging instrument.

ISSUE PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

1. Whether the prosecution failed to prove Michael Coleman guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of leaving the scene of an accident.

## JURISDICTION

Michael Coleman appeals from a final judgment of conviction in a criminal case. He was sentenced on April 30, 2012. (C. 24). A motion for new trial was filed on May 30, 2012. (C. 28). An amended motion for new trial was filed on June 25, 2012. The motion was denied on June 28, 2012. (R. 100). Notice of appeal was timely filed on July 30, 2012. (C. 38). Jurisdiction therefore lies in this Court pursuant to Article VI, Section 6, of the Illinois Constitution, and Supreme Court Rules 603 and 606.

## STATEMENT OF FACTS

The State presented the following evidence at trial.

Officer Kiari Morgan testified that on February 6, 2011, at approximately 9:30 a.m. he made a traffic stop in the 3700 block of 95th Street in Evergreen Park. Morgan testified, that the “nature of the stop” was a “hit and run” accident. (R. 7).

Defense counsel objected on the basis of hearsay and foundation. The prosecutor replied that Morgan’s testimony that there was a “hit and run” accident was not introduced for the “truth of the matter asserted,” but it was “simply a question about the date.” (R. 7).

Morgan then testified that he stopped a car for lane change and failure to signal. (R. 8). Without further objection, Morgan then testified that the vehicle was stopped because it “fit the description that my dispatcher gave me of a vehicle that was involved in an accident.” (R. 9).

Morgan testified that the stopped vehicle stopped when he attempted to stop it. (R. 9). Morgan testified that the person in the stopped car, when asked whether he was involved in an accident, immediately stated that a vehicle had sideswiped his vehicle. (R. 12).

According to Morgan, Morgan could not recall defendant making any other statements regarding being sideswiped. (R. 11) such as time, date, or place. In response to a leading question, Morgan testified that defendant did not indicate “why he did not stop to report the accident.” However, Morgan also stated that defendant made no other statements about the accident at all, and that Morgan made no inquiries about the accident. (R. 24).

The prosecution next called detective Anthony Signorelli.

Signorelli testified that he spoke with a Mary Parker at approximately 9:30 p.m. on February 6, 2011 about an accident. (R. 51). Although the prosecutor attempted to introduce the substance of Parker's conversation with officer Signorelli, a hearsay objection to these statements was sustained. After the trial court sustained the objection, the prosecutor attempted to argue that this conversation was not being introduced for the truth of the matter asserted but only to show the course of the investigation. The trial court responded that that objection was well-taken and would be sustained. (R. 52).

The prosecutor then asked Signorelli whether after speaking to Mary Parker he had made a "report" to other officers about an accident. After Signorelli responded that he had, the prosecutor asked him "what" he had reported. Signorelli responded that he spoke to officers who were "where the vehicle was stopped that was involved in the crash." Defense counsel's objection to this question on the grounds that this question assumed facts not in evidence was overruled. (R. 53).

The prosecutor next asked Signorelli why he "responded" to the "other location." Signorelli responded:

"Because our dispatch assigned me this hit and run accident, and they gave a description of a black Pontiac with a license plate. I don't recall the exact numbers to it. A few minutes later, I heard officer Kiari Morgan make a traffic stop on a vehicle with a very similar license plate. I believe it was one digit off. He said the dispatch said the vehicle that struck the motorist was following the offending vehicle." (R 53-54).

Defense counsel objected to this statement as hearsay and the trial judge

overruled the objection, saying “Well, that one I don’t think goes to the truth of the matter, so overruled.” (R. 54).

Signorelli also testified that the passenger side mirror was hanging off of defendant’s vehicle and this seemed to be “fresh damage.” (R. 54). A video showing damage to defendant’s car was admitted into evidence as State Exhibit 1. (R. 74).

At a later point, the prosecutor attempted to elicit from Signorelli that the “woman” identified defendant’s vehicle as the vehicle involved in the accident, but an objection to this question and answer was also sustained. (R. 56).

The state rested and the defense did not present evidence.

After argument, the trial judge found the defendant not guilty of driving under the influence but guilty of leaving the scene of an accident and of fleeing and eluding the police. As to the charge of leaving the scene of an accident, the trial judge based his ruling on the video showing damage to the vehicle and “given the testimony of the officers, how they described it.” (R. 92).

Defendant filed a motion for a new trial (C. 29) and an amended motion for a new trial (C. 31) alleging inter alia that he had not been proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of leaving the scene of an accident. The motion argued that his statement did not establish every element of the offense (C. 34-35) ; that, under the corpus delicti rule, there was no corroboration of every element of the offense (C. 35-36); and that the only corroborating evidence introduced in support of this offense was inadmissible hearsay, to which objections had been sustained. (C. 36).

After hearing arguments on the motion, the trial judge ruled that proof had been established as to the charge based upon:

(1) Officer Morgan’s testimony that the “defendant’s car matched the description

of the vehicle involved in the accident. That came in on page 9 of the transcript and there was no objection proffered.” (R. 113);

- (2) Defendant’s statement that he had been involved in an accident. (R. 114);
- (3) “The transcript, page 11, line 13, Officer Mor[g]an testified investigating a hit and run, there was a defense counsel objection to that. (R. 114);
- (4) Officer Signorelli’s testimony that he “responded” to a hit and run on the night of the arrest, which “went in on page 51 without any objection.” (R. 114);
- (5) Officer Signorelli’s testimony that he spoke with Mary Parker. (R. 114);
- (6) Officer Signorelli’s testimony that he observed a hanging mirror on defendant’s car. (R. 114-15).

As to (5), the trial judge stated:

“[Signorelli] testified he spoke with Mary Parker, who reported the hit and run. Yes, Mary Parker did not come to court, however, I do believe there was sufficient evidence from the officers that testified regarding the description of a vehicle, license plate involved, and that there was a hit and run that matched the defendant’s vehicle except for a single digit on the license plate, which came in on page 53 without any objection. (R. 114).

The trial judge acknowledged the existence of the corpus delicti rule (R. 115) but stated that “among” the elements were a “driver involved in an accident,” that “fails to remain at the scene.” He rejected the view that “it is required that you show when or where the act took place apart from a separate location that was testified to with regards to both officers talking about the license plate, the hanging mirror, and the digits and all the evidence that did match.” He reiterated that he was relying upon the officers’

testimony that they were investigating a hit and run and that they “were looking for a car with a description matching the defendant’s .” (R. 116).

After the trial judge ruled, defense counsel attempted to orally amend the motion to add an allegation that defense counsel was ineffective for failing to object to the hearsay the court relied upon. (R. 123-24). The trial judge denied the motion, saying that counsel had objected to the hearsay, and that as to certain testimony which was offered, “I don’t believe necessarily some of that went to the truth of the matter asserted.” (R. 124).

## ARGUMENT

I:

MICHAEL COLEMAN'S CONVICTION FOR LEAVING THE SCENE OF AN ACCIDENT MUST BE REVERSED BECAUSE HE WAS NOT PROVED GUILTY BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT UNDER THE CORPUS DELICTI RULE; THE TRIAL JUDGE'S RULING TO THE CONTRARY RESTS UPON A MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE ELEMENTS OF LEAVING THE SCENE OF AN ACCIDENT, AS WELL AS UPON HEARSAY WHICH THE PROSECUTION HAD REPRESENTED, AND WHICH THE TRIAL JUDGE HAD RULED, WAS NOT BEING ADMITTED FOR ITS TRUTH

Because he was not proved guilty of reasonable doubt, Michael Coleman's conviction for leaving the scene of an accident must be reversed.

The due process clause protects an accused against conviction except upon proof beyond a reasonable doubt of every fact necessary to constitute the crime with which he is charged. U.S. CONST., amend. XIV; ILL. CONST. 1970, art. I, sec. 2 (1970); *In Re Winship*, 397 U.S. 358, 364 (1970). It is true that when a court considers a challenge to a criminal conviction based on the sufficiency of the evidence, its function is not to retry the defendant. *People v. Milka*, 211 Ill.2d 150, 178, 810 N.E.2d 33 (2004). The relevant inquiry is whether, after viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, any rational trier of fact could have found the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. *People v. Woods*, 214 Ill.2d 455, 470, 828 N.E.2d 247 (2005). Under this standard, a reviewing court must draw all reasonable inferences from the record in favor of the prosecution. *People v. Bush*, 214 Ill.2d 318, 326, 827 N.E.2d 455 (2005). However, a court will of review will overturn the fact finder's

verdict if “the proof is so improbable or unsatisfactory that there exists a reasonable doubt of the defendant's guilt.” *People v. Schott*, 145 Ill.2d 188, 202-03, 582 N.E.2d 690 (1991).

Under this standard, it is the reviewing court’s duty to “carefully consider the evidence [and] to reverse the judgment if the evidence is not sufficient to remove all reasonable doubt of the defendant’s guilt and is not sufficient to create an abiding conviction that he is guilty of the crime charged.” *People v. Ash*, 102 Ill. 2d 485, 492-493 (1984); In fulfilling this duty, a reviewing court “may find, after considering the whole record, that flaws in testimony made it impossible for any fact finder reasonably to accept any part of it.” *People v. Cunningham*, 212 Ill. 2d 274, 279-280 (2004).

In this case, the only admissible evidence tending to prove the guilt of the defendant was his oral statement that this car had been sideswiped . (R. 11, 12, 24). This evidence was insufficient to prove that defendant was guilty of leaving the scene of an accident under 625 ILCS 5/11-402.

625 ILCS 5/11-402 provides:

“§ 11-402. Motor vehicle accident involving damage to vehicle.

(a) The driver of any vehicle involved in a motor vehicle accident resulting only in damage to a vehicle which is driven or attended by any person shall immediately stop such vehicle at the scene of such motor vehicle accident or as close thereto as possible, but shall forthwith return to and in every event shall remain at the scene of such motor vehicle accident until the requirements of Section 11-403 have been fulfilled. Every such stop shall be made without obstructing traffic more than is necessary. If a damaged vehicle is obstructing traffic lanes, the driver of the vehicle

must make every reasonable effort to move the vehicle or have it moved so as not to block the traffic lanes.”

Under 625 ILCS 5/11-406:

“Duty to give information and render aid. The driver of any vehicle involved in a motor vehicle accident resulting in injury to or death of any person or damage to any vehicle which is driven or attended by any person shall give the driver's name, address, registration number and owner of the vehicle the driver is operating and shall upon request and if available exhibit such driver's license to the person struck or the driver or occupant of or person attending any vehicle collided with and shall render to any person injured in such accident reasonable assistance, including the carrying or the making of arrangements for the carrying of such person to a physician, surgeon or hospital for medical or surgical treatment, if it is apparent that such treatment is necessary or if such carrying is requested by the injured person.

“ If none of the persons entitled to information pursuant to this Section is in condition to receive and understand such information and no police officer is present, such driver after rendering reasonable assistance shall forthwith report such motor vehicle accident at the nearest office of a duly authorized police authority, disclosing the information required by this Section.

Any person failing to comply with this Section shall be guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.”

In this particular case, no admissible evidence was introduced as to when the accident happened, where it happened, whether the driver of the other vehicle who had sideswiped defendant's vehicle was available and in a condition to receive and understand the required information, and/or whether defendant was on his way to the

nearest office of a duly authorized police authority to disclose the required information, all elements of the offense of leaving the scene of an accident under sections 11-402 and 11-403.

The defendant's bare admission that he had been sideswiped at some unknown date to establish his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Defendant's statement failed to address any of the elements of the evidence, including when the accident happened, where it happened, whether the driver of the other vehicle who had sideswiped defendant's vehicle was available and in a condition to receive and understand the required information, and/or whether defendant was on his way to the nearest office of a duly authorized police authority to disclose the required information. All the evidence established was that defendant's car had been involved in an accident. No evidence was introduced to establish that the defendant had failed to perform his duty under the statute.

The trial court, without explaining his reasoning, apparently rejected the plain language of the statute and concluded that the only elements of the offense which needed to be established were that the defendant was a "driver involved in an accident," that "fails to remain at the scene." He rejected the view that "it is required that you show when or where the act took place apart from a separate location." (R 116).

In fact, the IPI jury instructions, which track the statute, state that to prove the offense of leaving the scene of an accident involving damage to a vehicle, the state must prove beyond a reasonable doubt:

*First Proposition:* That the defendant was the driver of a vehicle involved in a motor vehicle accident; and

*Second Proposition:* That damage to a vehicle driven or attended by another person resulted from the accident; and

*Third Proposition:* That the defendant knew an accident had occurred; and

*Fourth Proposition:* That the defendant [ *(failed to immediately stop the vehicle at the scene of the accident) (failed to stop as close to the scene of the accident as possible without obstructing traffic more than necessary and forthwith return to the scene of the accident) ]* and remain at the scene of the accident until the defendant had performed the duty to give information and render aid.”

#### IL-IPICRIM 23.10

The duty to give information and render aid which the state must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant failed to perform is defined as follows:

“The phrase “the duty to give information and render aid” means that the driver of any vehicle involved in a motor vehicle accident resulting in [ *(death) (personal injury) (damage to a vehicle) ]* shall (1) supply the driver's name and address, (2) supply the registration number and the name of the owner of the vehicle the driver is operating, and (3) exhibit his driver's license upon request if the license is available. Such information is to be supplied to any person struck by a vehicle and to any person driving, occupying, or attending a vehicle involved in a collision. [If none of the persons entitled to this information is in a position to receive and understand such information, and no police officer is present, the driver shall forthwith report such accident at the nearest office of a duly authorized police authority, disclosing all this information.]

[In addition, the driver of any vehicle involved in a motor vehicle accident shall render to any person injured in such accident reasonable assistance[, including the carrying or the making of arrangements for the carrying of such person to a physician, surgeon, or hospital for medical or surgical treatment, if it is apparent that such treatment is necessary or if such carrying is requested by the injured person].]”

#### IL-IPICRIM 23.11

The trial judge was therefore simply mistaken as to the elements of the offense. Misunderstanding the statute, he convicted defendant where some, but not all, of the elements had been proved.

Moreover, even assuming that defendant’s statement is held to have included an admission to all of the elements of the offense, under the corpus delicti rule, the statement was insufficient to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Illinois has long followed the rule that “proof of the corpus delicti may not rest exclusively on a defendant's extrajudicial confession, admission, or other statement.”

*People v. Sargent*, 239 Ill.2d 166, 183-87 (2010). There must be some evidence corroborating every element of the crime charged. *Sargent*, 239 Ill. 2d at 183; *Bergen v. People*, 17 Ill. 425, 427–28 (1856); *Wistrand v. People*, 213 Ill. 72, 79, 72 N.E. 748 (1904); *People v. Lara*, 408 Ill.App.3d 732, 739, 946 N.E.2d 516, 522-523, (1st Dist. 2011).

Here, there was absolutely no evidence corroborating any element of the crime except for Officer Signorelli’s observation of “fresh” damage to defendant’s vehicle, which would tend to show that defendant’s car had been in some recent accident. No other admissible evidence corroborated any other element of the crime charged.

The trial judge’s opposite conclusion is based upon a profound misunderstanding of the record. Throughout the trial, the prosecution attempted to introduce the hearsay statements of Mary Parker, dispatch reports, and statements of nontestifying officers. (R. 7-8, 51, 52). At each point, the prosecutor asserted that it was not seeking to introduce these matters not for the truth of the matter asserted but only for some other, unspecified purpose. (R. 8, 52). The trial court sustained a number of objections to attempts to introduce these hearsay statements. (R. 52, 56).

While acknowledging that he had sustained these objections, the trial judge reasoned in rejecting the motion for a new trial that enough hearsay had been admitted without objection to establish proof beyond a reasonable doubt. (R 113-114). The trial judge was wrong.

The trial judge’s key claim was that defense counsel had failed to object to the following testimony from officer Signorelli, responding to a question of why he had gone to another location:

“Because our dispatch assigned me this hit and run accident, and they gave a

description of a black Pontiac with a license plate. I don't recall the exact numbers to it. A few minutes later, I heard officer Kiari Morgan make a traffic stop on a vehicle with a very similar license plate. I believe it was one digit off. He said the dispatch said the vehicle that struck the motorist was following the offending vehicle.” (R 53-54).

The trial judge claimed that this statement was admitted without objection. In fact, however, defendant promptly objected immediately after it was clear that hearsay had been elicited and the court overruled the objection, saying: “Well, that one I don't think goes to the truth of the matter, so overruled.” (R. 54).

In other words, the trial judge at the motion for new trial considered as substantive evidence hearsay which he had originally admitted not for the truth of the matter asserted, but only for some other purpose, presumably to show the course of the police investigation. This evidence, particularly the evidence of the license plate near match was rank hearsay which should not have been admitted or considered for its truth

The remaining instances of unobjected to hearsay cited by the trial judge include officer Morgan's testimony that the defendant's car “matched the description” of the vehicle involved in the accident (R. 9, 113), officer Signorelli's testimony that he responded to a “hit and run,” (R. 51, 114), and Morgan's supposed statement that he was investigating a hit and run. (R. 114). The third instance is an apparent mistake because there is no reference to investigating a hit and run on page 11, line 13 of the transcript as the judge claimed. (R. 11).

While it is true that there was no objection to Morgan's testimony about “matching” and Signorelli's statement about investigating a hit and run, neither statement established the elements of the crime charged. Moreover, the prosecution maintained from the beginning of the trial, when defense counsel objected to the

Morgan's testimony that the "nature" of his traffic stop was a "hit and run" accident (R. 7), that this testimony was not being introduced for the truth of the matter asserted. (R. 8). With this representation, defense counsel was entitled to conclude that these statements were only intended to show the course of the police investigation and not for the truth of the matters asserted, and this explains why he did not object when Morgan and Signorelli explained, when asked by the prosecutor, why they what they did.

Michael Coleman's conviction should therefore be reversed.

## CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Michael Coleman's conviction for leaving the scene of an accident should be reversed.

Respectfully submitted,

STEPHEN L. RICHARDS

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COUNSEL FOR DEFENDANT-APPELLANT

APPENDIX

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JUDGMENT APPEALED FROM

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS

OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

or

Municipal Corporation

Michael Coleman

Criminal Division  Municipal District No. 5 Br/Rm 102  
Case No.: YT 260 189, 11MCS 000662  
Statute Citation: 11 402, 625 5/11-204  
IR No. \_\_\_\_\_ SID No. \_\_\_\_\_

SENTENCING ORDER

SUPERVISION - CONDITIONAL DISCHARGE - PROBATION

BEY ORDERED that the defendant is sentenced to a term of 1  Year(s)  Month(s)  Day(s)  
Division  Conditional Discharge  Probation (720 ILCS 550/10, 720 ILCS 570/410, or 720 ILCS 646/70)  Probation  
REPORTING (All DUI orders are reporting)  NON-REPORTING  LIMITED REPORTING (Monitor community service or restitution only)  
Scheduled Termination Date 4/29/13

OTHER ORDERED that the defendant shall comply with the conditions as specified below:

STANDARD CONDITIONS

Reporting is ordered, the defendant shall report immediately to the Social Service Department for conditional discharge/probation/community service and pay that department the sum as determined by that department in accordance with the standard probation fee guide. Said fee not to exceed \$50.00 per month.  
The defendant shall report to the Adult Probation Department for probation/community service, comply with Adult Probation's rules and regulations and pay that department such sum as determined by that department in accordance with the standard probation fee guide. Said fee not to exceed \$50.00 per month.  
**Fines, costs, fees, assessments, reimbursements and restitution (if applicable)**  
The defendant shall comply with the criminal statute of any jurisdiction prohibiting the defendant from possessing a firearm or other dangerous weapons.  
The defendant shall report to the monitoring agency of change of address in Cook County, Illinois or the State of Illinois without the consent of the court and the monitoring agency.  
The defendant shall comply with reporting and treatment requirements as determined by the Adult Probation Department assessment. Treatment requirements not specified elsewhere on this order that would cause a financial hardship shall be reviewed by the court before being imposed.

DUI RELATED CONDITIONS

- DUI Offenders Classified Level A, report immediately to Central States Institute of Addictions and commence the following intervention program within 60 days of this order:
  - Minimum  Moderate  Significant
- DUI Offenders Classified Level B or C, report immediately to:
  - The Social Service Department,
  - The Adult Probation Departmentand complete a Comprehensive Correctional Intervention Assessment within 30 days, fully comply with the Comprehensive Intervention Plan and commence the following intervention program within 60 days of this order:
  - Minimum  Moderate  Significant  High
- Attend a Victim Impact Panel
- File proof of financial responsibility with the Secretary of State
- Surrender driver's license to the Clerk of the Court
- Pay all driver's license reinstatement fees

SPECIAL CONDITIONS

- Obtain a GED
- Home Confinement \_\_\_\_\_ days
- Adult Probation Department Intensive Probation Supervision
- Perform \_\_\_\_\_ hours of a community service as directed by the
  - Social Service Department Community Service Program
  - Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (773) 869-3686
  - Adult Probation Department
- Avoid contact with \_\_\_\_\_

ALCOHOL RELATED CONDITIONS

Complete drug/alcohol evaluation and treatment recommendations  
Subject to random drug testing  
Probation Department Intensive Drug Program  
Complete TASC Treatment Program

- Complete mental health evaluation and treatment recommendations
- Adult Probation Department Mental Health Unit
- Adult Probation Department Gang Unit
- DNA Indexing



NOTICE OF APPEAL

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY

CRIMINAL DIVISION

PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS,

)  
)  
)  
)  
)  
)  
)  
)

Circuit Court No. 1150066201

Honorable

Russell W. Hartigan

MICHAEL N. COLEMAN

**NOTICE OF APPEAL**

Appeal is taken from the Order of judgment described below:

Court to which appeal is taken: Appellate Court of Illinois, First District

Appellant's Name: MICHAEL N. COLEMAN

Appellant's Attorney: STEPHEN L. RICHARDS  
651 w. Washington, Suite 205  
Chicago, IL 60661  
773-817-6927

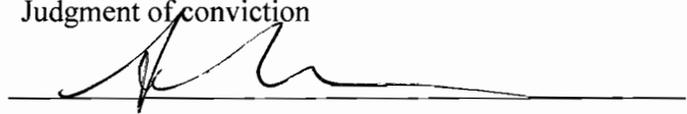
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FILED

Offenses of which convicted: Leaving the scene of an accident and resisting arrest

Date of Judgment or order: June 28, 2012

Sentence: One year supervision

Nature of order appealed from: Judgment of conviction



STEPHEN L. RICHARDS

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