

# Zipper Merge Turns Confrontational: Phobos on Trial

By: Landen Sharer

A Sarpy County Courtroom was filled with tension Wednesday morning as the trial of Ellis Phobos vs The State of Nebraska began. The case involves a zipper merge that escalated into a conflict among three parties. Prosecutors argued that “one person turned anger into danger, and that was the defendant”. The defense claims Ms. Phobos was “an innocent driver who tried to do the right thing, but then got nothing but disrespect in return”.

The call for conflict was a traffic incident that occurred on 18th Street, near Hiperion Drive, earlier this year. Where the defendant, Ellis Phobos, allegedly sped up and rear-ended a vehicle operated by the plaintiff, Addison Williams. Ellis Phobos is now facing felony charges of making terroristic threats towards Addison Williams and 3rd degree assault towards Casey Thomas.

The incident unfolded around 5:30 P.M. on March 14th, 2025, when northbound traffic on 18th Street was being forced to condense from two lanes to one. According to witnesses, Phobos approached Williams, upset that he was “cut off and breakchecked” by Williams. He then allegedly started pounding and shouting at Williams, saying, “You know you're going to pay for this, right?” as testified by both parties.

Williams told police that she was attempting a zipper merge when suddenly Phobos sped up, narrowing the gap she needed to merge, and she was able to successfully get into the left lane. After doing so, Phobos allegedly started honking and flailing his arms, upset that she was “Cut off.” Williams testified that she slowed down to a complete stop because the vehicles in

front of her were doing so, and that is when Mrs. Phobos made contact with the back of her vehicle.

Testimony varies about what happened following the collision. Williams testified that Phobos stomped up, started pounding on the window, and shouting “You're going to pay for this” in a menacing manner. Ms. Williams remained inside her vehicle until law enforcement arrived.

Casey Thomas, who was driving behind Phobos, added that Phobos was “enraged.” He got out to calm down Phobos because he “wanted to help the young driver.” Phobos then got in his face and started insulting his intelligence.

Other witnesses on the scene described the scene differently. Max Shunkpike, a road engineer for Wagon Wheel County, testified that Williams suddenly cut off Mrs. Phobos, and then brake checked them. She also added Ms. Williams blatantly ignored Mrs. Phobos, who was just trying to exchange insurance information, and even reported seeing Ms. Williams flip off the defendant. Mrs. Shunkpike testified that Phobos reacted “as a reasonable person would.” Another bystander, Jordan Jones, a local podcaster, described Phobos' actions as “aggressive but not terrorizing”.

Officer Shay Nolan, the officer dispatched to the scene, described seeing upon arrival Phobos “pacing rapidly” and “threatening imminent harm,” while Williams was “cowering inside her vehicle”. After interviewing those involved, he found it necessary to cite Mrs. Phobos for negligent driving. Officer Shay Nolan also testified that he is not the one who elevated the charges to include terroristic threats and 3rd degree assault; it was the prosecutor.

Phobos does not find these charges necessary, saying that her anger stemmed from being cut off, brake checked, and wrongly accused, and they only wanted to exchange insurance

information. Mrs. Phobos has claimed that the allegations have already harmed her personal and professional life, including her children's custody.

With the trial now concluded, the zipper-merge dispute at 18th and Hyperion still raises questions for Goldenrod residents about how a simple zipper merger escalated into a dangerous confrontation.