

**IN THE IOWA DISTRICT COURT IN AND FOR JASPER COUNTY****FILED**

SEP 11 2025

TIME 4:20 pm  
JASPER COUNTY CLERK OF COURT**AMY JO VROEGH,****Plaintiff,****vs.****MATHEW THOMAS CHIZEK and  
HEARTLAND CO-OP,****Defendants.****Law No. LACV123489****STATEMENT OF THE CASE  
and  
JURY INSTRUCTIONS****JUDGE ELISABETH REYNOLDSON****STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

Plaintiff Amy Vroegh claims Defendant Mathew Thomas Chizek, through the course and scope of his employment with Defendant Heartland Co-Op, was negligent in the operation of his vehicle and that said negligence was the cause of damage to the Plaintiff. Plaintiff also claims that Defendant Heartland Co-Op, as the employer of Defendant Chizek, is liable for the negligence of Defendant Chizek as the acts were done in the scope of the employment.

The Defendants have admitted liability for the accident but dispute the nature, extent and cause of the Plaintiff's claimed injuries and damages.

Do not consider this summary as proof of any claim. You will decide the facts from the evidence and apply the law that I will now give you.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 1**

My duty is to tell you what the law is. Your duty is to accept and apply this law.

You must consider all of the instructions together because no one instruction includes all of the applicable law.

The order in which I give these instructions is not important.

Your duty is to decide all fact questions.

As you consider the evidence, do not be influenced by any personal sympathy, bias, prejudices or emotions. Because you are making very important decisions in this case, you are to evaluate the evidence carefully and avoid decisions based on generalizations, gut feelings, prejudices, sympathies, stereotypes, or biases. The law demands that you return a just verdict, based solely on the evidence, your reason and common sense, and these instructions. As jurors, your sole duty is to find the truth and do justice.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 2**

Whenever a party must prove something, they must do so by a preponderance of the evidence.

Preponderance of the evidence is evidence that is more convincing than opposing evidence. Preponderance of the evidence does not depend upon the number of witnesses testifying on one side or the other.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 3**

You shall base your verdict only upon the evidence and these instructions.

Evidence is:

1. Testimony in person or by deposition.
2. Exhibits received by the court.
3. Stipulations which are agreements between the attorneys.
4. Any other matter admitted (e.g. answers to interrogatories, matters which judicial notice was taken, etc.).

Evidence may be direct or circumstantial. The weight to be given any evidence is for you to decide.

Sometimes, during a trial, references are made to pre-trial statements and reports, witnesses' depositions, or other miscellaneous items. Only those things formally offered and received by the court are available to you during your deliberations. Documents or items read from or referred to which were not offered and received into evidence, are not available to you.

The following are not evidence:

1. Statements, arguments, questions and comments by the lawyers.
2. Objections and rulings on objections.
3. Any testimony I told you to disregard.
4. Anything you saw or heard about this case outside the courtroom.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 4**

Certain testimony has been read into evidence from a deposition. A deposition is testimony taken under oath before the trial and preserved in writing. Consider that testimony as if it had been given in court.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 5**

During this trial, you have heard the word 'interrogatory.' An interrogatory is a written question asked by one party of another, who must answer it under oath in writing. Consider interrogatories and the answers to them as if the questions had been asked and answered here in court.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 6**

You will decide the facts from the evidence. Consider the evidence using your observations, common sense and experience. You must try to reconcile any conflicts in the evidence; but, if you cannot, you will accept the evidence you find more believable.

In determining the facts, you may have to decide what testimony you believe. You may believe all, part or none of any witnesses' testimony.

There are many factors which you may consider in deciding what testimony to believe, for example:

1. Whether the testimony is reasonable and consistent with other evidence you believe;
2. The witnesses' appearance, conduct, age, intelligence, memory and knowledge of the facts; and,
3. The witnesses' interest in the trial, their motive, candor, bias and prejudice.



**INSTRUCTION NO. 7**

You have heard evidence claiming a party made statements before this trial while under oath and while not under oath.

If you find such a statement was made, you may regard the statement as evidence in this case the same as if the party had made it under oath during the trial.

If you find such a statement was made and was inconsistent with the party's testimony during the trial, you may also use the statement as a basis for disregarding all or any part of the party's testimony during the trial, but you are not required to do so. You should not disregard the party's testimony during the trial if other credible evidence supports it or if you believe it for any other reason.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 8**

You have heard testimony from persons described as experts. Persons who have become experts in a field because of their education and experience may give their opinion on matters in that field and the reasons for their opinion.

Consider expert testimony just like any other testimony. You may accept it or reject it. You may give it as much weight as you think it deserves, considering the witness' education and experience, the reasons given for the opinion, and all the other evidence in the case.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 9**

An expert witness was asked to assume certain facts were true and to give an opinion based on that assumption. This is called a hypothetical question. If any fact assumed in the question has not been proved by the evidence, you should decide if that omission affects the value of the opinion.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 10**

The plaintiff must prove all of the following propositions:

1. Defendant Chizek's negligence was a cause of damage to the plaintiff.
2. The amount of damage.

If the plaintiff has failed to prove either of these propositions, the plaintiff is not entitled to damages. If the plaintiff has proved both of these propositions, the plaintiff is entitled to damages in some amount.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 11**

The conduct of a party is a cause of damage when the damage would not have happened except for the conduct.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 12**

The law does not impose liability for negligence unless the breach of a duty of care is also the cause in fact of Amy Vroegh's claimed damages. Mathew Chizek's conduct must have in fact caused Amy Vroegh's claimed damages. To recover for damages, the Plaintiff must prove that the damages would not have occurred but for the Defendant, Mathew Chizek's, negligence.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 13**

If you find the Plaintiff is entitled to recover damages, you shall consider the following items:

1. Past physical and mental pain and suffering from the date of injury to the present.
2. The present value of the future physical and mental pain and suffering.
3. Past loss of function of the body from the date of injury to the present time.
4. The present value of the future loss of function of the body.

The amount you assess for physical and mental pain and suffering in the past and future and loss of function of the body in the past and future cannot be measured by any exact or mathematical standard. You must use your sound judgment based upon an impartial consideration of the evidence. Your judgment must not be exercised arbitrarily, or out of sympathy or prejudice, for or against the parties. The amount you assess for any item of damage must not exceed the amount caused by a party as proved by the evidence.

A party cannot recover duplicate damages. Do not allow amounts awarded under one item of damage to be included in any amount awarded under another item of damage.

The amounts, if any, you find for each of the above items will be used to answer the special verdicts.



**INSTRUCTION NO. 14****Past Physical and Mental Pain and Suffering**

Physical and mental pain and suffering from the date of injury to the present time. Physical pain and suffering may include, but is not limited to, bodily suffering or discomfort. Mental pain and suffering may include, but is not limited to, mental anguish or loss of enjoyment of life.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 15****Future Physical and Mental Pain and Suffering**

The present value of future physical and mental pain and suffering.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 16****Past Loss of Function of the Body**

Loss of function of the body from the date of injury to the present time. Loss of body is the inability of a particular part of the body to function in a normal manner.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 17****Future Loss of Function of the Body**

The present value of future loss of function of the body.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 18**

If you find Plaintiff had a shoulder injury before the March 18, 2023 collision and this condition was aggravated by the collision causing further suffering then Plaintiff is entitled to recover damages caused by the aggravation. Plaintiff is not entitled to recover for any physical ailment or disability which existed before the March 18, 2023 collision or for any injuries or damages which Plaintiff now has which were not caused by the collision.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 19**

If you find Plaintiff was injured by another act or series of acts after the March 18, 2023 collision, Plaintiff cannot recover for any later injury or aggravation of injury not caused by the March 18, 2023 collision.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 20**

In arriving at an item of damage you cannot arrive at a figure by taking down the estimate of each juror as to an item of damage, and agreeing in advance that the average of those estimates shall be your item of damage.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 21**

Future damages must be reduced to present value. "Present value" is a sum of money paid now in advance which, together with interest earned at a reasonable rate of return, will compensate the plaintiff for future losses.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 22**

A Standard Mortality Table indicates the normal life expectancy of people who are the same age as Plaintiff is 37.29 years. The statistics from a Standard Mortality Table are not conclusive. You may use this information, together with all the other evidence, about Plaintiff's health, habits, occupation, and lifestyle, when deciding issues of future damages.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 23**

During the trial, you have been allowed to take notes. You may take these with you to the jury room to use in your deliberations. Remember, these are notes and not evidence. Generally, they reflect the recollection or impressions of the evidence as viewed by the person taking them, and may be inaccurate or incomplete.

Upon reaching a verdict, leave the notes in the jury room and they will be destroyed.

**INSTRUCTION NO. 24**

You may not communicate about this case before reaching your verdict. This includes via cell phone and electronic media such as text messages, email, electronic messaging applications, and any social media platform including but not limited to Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter/X, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and any other social media applications you may use.

Do not do any research or make any investigation about this case on your own. Do not visit or view any place discussed in this case, and do not use internet or application-based maps or programs, or any other application, program, or device to search for or view any place discussed in the testimony. Also, do not research any information about this case, the law, or the people involved, including the parties, the witnesses, the lawyers, or the judge. This includes using the Internet to research events or people referenced in the trial. This case will be tried on evidence presented in the courtroom. If you conduct independent research, you will be relying on matters not presented in court. The parties have a right to have this case decided on the evidence they know about and that has been introduced here in court. If you do some research or investigation or experiment that we do not know about, then your verdict may be influenced by inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading information that has not been tested by the trial process, including the oath to tell the truth and by cross-examination. All of the parties are entitled to a fair trial, rendered by an impartial jury, and you must conduct yourself so as to maintain the integrity of the trial process. If you decide a case based on information not presented in



court, you will have denied the parties a fair trial in accordance with the rules of this state and you will have done an injustice. It is very important that you abide by these rules. Failure to follow these instructions may result in the case having to be retried and could result in you being held in contempt and punished.

It is important that we have your full and undivided attention during this trial.

#### **INSTRUCTION NO. 25**

Upon retiring you shall select a foreman or forewoman. It will be his or her duty to see discussion is carried on in an orderly fashion, the issues are fully and freely discussed, and each juror is given an opportunity to express his or her views.

Your attitude at the beginning of your deliberations is important. It is not a good idea for you to take a position before thoroughly discussing the case with the other jurors. If you do this, individual pride may become involved and you may later hesitate to change an announced position even if shown it may be incorrect. Remember you are not partisans or advocates, but are judges - judges of the facts. Your sole interest is to find the truth and do justice.



**INSTRUCTION NO. 26**

Occasionally, after a jury retires to the jury room, the members have questions. I have prepared the Instructions after carefully considering this case with the attorneys. I have tried to use language that is generally understandable. Usually, questions about Instructions can be answered by carefully rereading them. If, however, any of you feel it is necessary to ask a question, you must do so in writing and deliver the question to the court attendant.

I cannot communicate with you without first discussing your question and potential answers with the parties and attorneys. This process naturally takes time and deliberation before I can respond. When I respond, it will be in writing, and the foreperson must read the response to the jury. Keep the written question and response and return it to open court with the Verdict.

The court attendant who has been working with me on this case is in the same position as I am. She has taken an oath not to communicate with you except to ask if you have reached a verdict. Please do not ask her to violate that oath by asking her questions about the case.


**INSTRUCTION NO. 27**

I am giving you one verdict form with two questions. During the first six hours of deliberations, excluding meals and recesses outside your jury room, your decision must be unanimous. If you all agree, the verdict form must be signed by your foreman or forewoman.

After deliberating for six hours from 2:10 o'clock p.m., on September 11, 2025, excluding meals or recesses outside your jury room, then it is necessary that only seven of you agree upon the answers to the questions. In that case, the verdict must be signed by all seven jurors who agree.

When you have agreed upon the verdict and appropriately signed it, tell the Court Attendant.

Dated: September 11, 2025.

  
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Elisabeth S. Reynoldson  
District Court Judge  
Fifth Judicial District of Iowa

