

# Sorrow & fury

## Mom to sue in fatal Queens creek-plunge crash

BY JOHN MARZULLI  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

THE MOTHER of a 21-year-old college student who drowned with three friends when their car plunged into a Queens creek intends to file a negligence suit against the city and the driver who miraculously survived the bizarre crash.

"I wouldn't want any other family to go through this again," said Velma Elliott, 62, the devastated mom of victim Darius Fletcher.

Elliott hopes there will be changes made at the scene to prevent the tragedy from being repeated, and as a memorial to the four friends who were inseparable in life and died together in a watery grave.

She also plans to meet this month with prosecutors from the Queens district attorney's office, who are investigating whether driver Andrew Gramm should be criminally charged in the April 6 crash. Al-

### EXCLUSIVE

though Gramm was not drinking, a police source told the Daily News he was traveling too fast for the wet road conditions when his Honda skidded sideways on a dead-end street and plunged into Steinway Creek in Astoria.

"How could they have ended up in the water?" said Fletcher's brother Omar Laidlow, 37. "There was a lack of barriers, signage, anything that would prevent that tragedy.

**Family of Darius Fletcher (r.), one of the victims in crash that killed four, will sue city and driver.**



There was nothing to identify that was the end of the road.

"I imagine their last minutes on Earth were the most terrifying thing anyone could experience and they had to suffer through that," added Laidlow, a Con Ed worker.

State Sen. Michael Gianaris has requested a review of safety measures at the site by the city Department of Transportation. There were "dead end" signs at the corner of the street,

but no sign or guardrail where the roadway ended.

The day after the tragedy, the city placed a concrete barrier at

the spot where the car went into the water.

"We're going to find out who's negligent and I believe there's a lot of people culpable," Laidlow said. "If (Gramm) was negligent or criminally liable, I'll let the legal system take care of him."

The family's lawyer, Sanford Rubenstein, said he will file a notice of claim to sue the city as soon as Elliott is approved as the administrator of her son's estate by the Surrogate Court.

"This is a horrible tragedy that should never have happened," Rubenstein said. "All of those who are responsible will be held accountable."

Fletcher was a senior at William Paterson University in New Jersey, majoring in public health. He was saving money to participate in an exchange program in South America as part of his studies, Laidlow said.

