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Mom: Amputation in Pa. bus crash 'excruciating'

PHILADELPHIA—An eastern Pennsylvania woman said having to decide whether doctors should amputate her teenage daughter's leg after she was run over by a school bus was "excruciating" and the "worst day ever of my life."

Faced with that testimony, a Bucks County jury will begin deliberating Monday over how much that suffering is worth in dollars and cents.

Seeing her daughter awaken from a medically induced coma, Marguerite Zauflik said she apologized for approving the amputation six inches above the girl's left knee.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Zauflik testified. "It was the only thing I could do to save your life."

Zauflik and her daughter, Ashley, testified Friday and the jury is expected to get the case after their attorneys and those defending the Pennsbury School District make their closing arguments Monday.

The family wants at least \$3 million in damages, plus compensation for pain and suffering from the district, which acknowledged liability this week, saying a driver error caused the crash on Jan. 12, 2007. Three days of testimony were then held to determine a damage amount.

The school district has offered \$500,000 combined to settle claims by the Zauflik's and seven other students less seriously injured by the bus, saying the award is capped by a law limiting the liability of school districts and municipalities.

The family's lawyer, [Tom Kline](#), argued the district isn't prohibited from paying more than the cap permits and said the Pennsylvania Supreme Court will likely end up hearing the case. The state's high court has not reviewed the cap since 1986, when its legality was upheld.

"This case will show what the community thinks the accident is worth," Kline said. School district attorney David Cohen declined to comment outside the courtroom Friday.

Ashley Zauflik, now 22, was 17 when the bus dragged her under a tire and crushing her leg and hip. Kline's experts contend her lifetime medical expenses will be more than \$3.2 million, mostly to cover prosthetic devices must be replaced and refitted during her lifetime, though an actuary said Zauflik's damages total more than \$7 million when lost earnings and inflation are included.

Zauflik has no memory of the accident, though she's struggled with depression because of the amputation. Her mother, though, testified that she'll never forget the ordeal that ensued after doctors explained they had to amputate the girl's leg to save her life.

"It was excruciating," the mother testified. "It was the worst day ever of my life."

Ashley Zauflik also testified, but only after her parents left the courtroom at her insistence so they wouldn't have to hear her painful testimony.

Asked to describe how she feels, Zauflik said, "Disfigured. Not the same. I have body issues I never had before."

Bucks County Judge Robert Mellon also permitted the jury to closely examine the girl's remaining leg in another room, accompanied by the attorneys.

Zauflik said she's struggled with the idea that her leg's "not going to come back" and explained that her body continues to play tricks on her mind.

"You feel your leg still," she testified. "Sometimes it itches. Sometimes it feels like your foot's moving. It messes up your head."