

## Settlement is reached in SEPTA injury case

### The Philadelphia Inquirer

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JANUARY 9, 2000

Grappling with a public-relations nightmare and a \$51 million jury verdict that threatened to cripple Philadelphia's mass transit system, SEPTA agreed last week to pay \$7.4 million to a 7-year-old boy whose right foot was sheared off by a subway escalator in 1996.

SEPTA initiated settlement talks Tuesday with [Thomas R. Kline](#), the attorney for Shareif Hall and his mother, Deneen.

SEPTA general manager Jack Leary said on Wednesday that the settlement would not lead to fare increases or service cuts, only "a little belt-tightening at SEPTA."

Joined by former Deputy City Solicitor James B. Jordan, recently hired by SEPTA to sort out its legal problems, Leary vowed to make sweeping changes in SEPTA's legal department and handling of claims.

In return for SEPTA's good-faith pledge, Common Pleas Court Judge Frederica A. Massiah-Jackson agreed to reduce a \$1 million contempt-of-court fine she had imposed to \$100,000. The judge found that SEPTA had withheld key documents and tampered with evidence after the accident.

"We are serious about change," Leary told reporters. "There are things broken at SEPTA, and we have made a very, very strong commitment to fix them."

Kline said the Halls were "very pleased" with the settlement and "grateful to put this behind them."

He said the \$7.4 million was "30 times more than the \$250,000 cap" the state legislature had placed on injury and property-damage awards against city and state agencies. "I think that it is a wonderful achievement for this child....Our job in this case was not to destroy SEPTA. Our job was to effectuate change. Most important to me is that SEPTA is committed to fixing the escalators."