



By Artemis Coughlan

Staff Writer

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Jury awards \$14 million to Pennsbury student who lost leg in runaway bus accident

DOYLESTOWN, Pa. — A Bucks County jury awarded \$14 million in damages and medical expenses Monday to Ashley Zauflik, the 17-year-old Pennsbury High student who lost a leg in 2007 after she was struck by a runaway bus.

Zauflik and her family sobbed as the verdict was read in Bucks County Court of Common Pleas. The Pennsbury School District intends to file a motion to cap the award at \$500,000, but Zauflik's attorney, [Tom Kline](#), vowed to fight for his client all the way to the Supreme Court.

The jury awarded damages of \$389,000, future medical expenses of \$2.6 million and future damages of \$11.1 million.

Zauflik, her mother and her friends in the courtroom cried as they heard the jury's award, but declined to comment afterward.

David Cohen, the district's attorney, said he is going to file a motion with Bucks County Court of Common Pleas Judge Robert Mellon asking that the award be capped at \$500,000, under a state law aimed at protecting school districts and municipalities.

But Kline said Pennsbury was in the busing business and should be treated like any other bus company — and should be held to the same standards.

During closing arguments, Cohen focused on Zauflik's only need in the future as being a prosthetic leg and replacements over her lifetime.

He offered the jury a settlement of \$1.5 million.

"This is not all about sympathy here. She's made a remarkable recovery," Cohen said

But Kline told jurors Zauflik, 22, suffered tremendously after her right leg, internal organs and pelvis were crushed and needed multiple surgeries.

The National Transportation Safety Board found that the driver stepped on the accelerator, not the brake, before crashing into a crowd of students during dismissal at Pennsbury High School.

The driver long disputed that finding, but the Pennsbury School District admitted liability before trial.

Zauflik was placed in a drug-induced coma after the January 2007 crash to save her from feeling the pain. Even while in the five-and-a-half-week coma, nurses reported that she winced when receiving routine care.

She was also embarrassed about her disfigured body, was self-conscious about her appearance and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, among other maladies.

"She suffered a loss of life enjoyment. Ashley had breakthrough pain. It broke through morphine," Kline told jurors.

"She lost all enjoyment of life. We're trying to put her back on the street. We're trying to make her life whole. Look behind the pretty face to see what is really Ashley.

"Now is the time for the officials at the Pennsbury School District to come out from behind the state cap and say 'We're going to take care of one of our own.'"

Kline originally asked jurors for a \$3 million settlement.

The millions, if Kline is successful in winning the case through the higher courts, will be put in a trust fund to provide for Ashley for the rest of her life, said her parents' attorney, William Goldman.