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[Matt Spillane](#), Rockland/Westchester Journal News

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A woman with special needs has won \$28 million in a lawsuit seven years after she was raped as a Mount Vernon High School student.

Lawyers for the woman, who is now 21 years old, said a jury ruled in their favor against the Mount Vernon school district on Friday, almost seven years after the victim was allowed to go home on a public bus instead of a school bus, a mistake her lawyers say led to a sexual assault, bullying and a brutal school beating.

"A young girl with special needs cannot be victimized and harmed more than this girl was," one of her lawyers, **Jordan Merson**, said outside the Westchester County Courthouse today.

"She is completely traumatized by what occurred," he said, adding that she has severe neurocognitive impairments. "If you ask her about it to this day, you cannot only hear the wails, the sobs, or the tears, but you can see the pain on her face before she gets to that point."

The lawsuit went to trial in Westchester Supreme Court, where the verdict was handed down on Friday. The woman testified in what Merson said was "the most emotional testimony I've ever seen."

"The whole courtroom had tears in their eyes," he said. "She was wailing. She was trying so hard to keep it together and not to break down, but you could see the pain and agony on her face. I have never seen such a clear display of agony on someone's face. It was very, very difficult to sit through, and I give her a lot of credit for coming forward. She is a hero for coming forward."

"She feels vindicated," he added. "This verdict, what we believe to be the largest sexual assault verdict in New York history, is a message loud and clear to every company and to every school district that for them to now say, we did not do the sexual assault, we are not responsible, is not acceptable."

The verdict ruled against the Mount Vernon school district and another Mount Vernon High School student who was accused of beating the woman in a school locker room in 2012. All County Bus was cleared of wrongdoing.

"The Mount Vernon City School District respectfully disagrees with the jury's verdict," the district said in a statement today. "We are considering our options moving forward."

"The school district never believed it," said Andrew Buzin, one of the woman's lawyers. "Part of their defense was this never happened."

The woman, whose name has not been released by her lawyers, was barely 14 years old when she went through a series of traumatic physical and emotional incidents that her lawyers said were primarily the fault of the school district.

The lawsuit focused on the 2011-2012 school year, when the woman was a freshman in a special-education program. She has cognitive disabilities that, at the time, put her comprehension on par with a first-grader's, her lawyers said.

The woman's lawyers said in the lawsuit, which was filed in 2012, that she began her freshman year by traveling to and from Mount Vernon High School on an All County Bus, which is what her family wanted.

All County Bus, a Yonkers-based school bus company, could not immediately be reached for comment.

At some point in the fall of 2011, according to the lawsuit, a Mount Vernon school district employee told the then-teenager that she no longer needed to take the All County Bus, and the freshman then started traveling on Westchester County's Bee-Line bus, without her family's knowledge.

Her family found out and alerted the school district that they wanted her on the All County Bus. On Dec. 19, 2011, though, she did not go home on that school bus. Instead, she went home with an older boy who raped her at his home, according to the lawsuit.

She told her family about the assault, but she was unable to identify her attacker, who has never been discovered, her lawyers said.

She was then bullied throughout the school year, in part because of rumors surrounding the rape, and, on March 19, 2012, she was brutally beaten by other students in a girls locker room at Mount Vernon High School, according to the lawsuit. Her head was slammed against the floor and a bench, which left her with a concussion and traumatic brain injury, according to the lawsuit.

After that, she was home-schooled the rest of the school year and has since been taking classes through BOCES, her lawyers said.

The lawsuit, which was filed in 2012 by the woman's aunt and guardian, named numerous defendants, including school district staff members, students and All County Bus. The district and bus company were negligent for allowing the then-teenager to be bullied and assaulted, according to the lawsuit.

The jury ruled that the school district was negligent, but that the bus company was not, according to court records.