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Amputee seeks millions from Bucks school district

A former Pennsbury High School student who lost a leg when a school bus ran over her in 2007 will need \$5.4 million to cover medical costs for the rest of her life, experts testified Thursday on her behalf in Bucks County Court.

Audrey Zauflik, now 21, of Fairless Hills, is suing the school district for monetary damages plus pain and suffering for the accident that crushed her pelvis, injured her spine and left her in a medically induced coma for a month. Her left leg was amputated above the knee to save her life.

The district had denied liability until Monday when, on the eve of the civil trial, it stipulated that its bus driver had caused the accident.

The driver mistakenly hit the gas pedal instead of the brake as Zauflik and other students waited to go home on Jan. 12, 2007, the district said, agreeing with accident investigators' findings.

"We're asking the district to put this girl back on her feet," Zauflik's lawyer, [Thomas Kline](#), said during a break in the testimony.

Kline is seeking more than \$66,000 for a high-tech prosthesis, plus costs of other equipment, medical care, therapy, medications and psychological services. He said the case challenges the constitutionality of the state's \$500,000 cap on financial liability.

"If the current state law caps damages at \$500,000, to be shared with seven other claimants [all students who suffered lesser injuries in the same accident], there must be something wrong with the law," Kline said in the break. "If we hadn't refused to accept the cap, the district would never have been held accountable."

The district has offered to pay the \$500,000 cap amount. The district's lawyer, David Cohen, declined to comment on that offer.

Zauflik's medical costs already total about \$338,000. And with a life expectancy of 78 years, her future medical costs will amount to \$2.6 million, life-care planner Betsy Bates testified.

"She has had pain since the time of the accident and continues to have pain," said Bates, a registered nurse.

Zauflik lives with her parents and two younger sisters, getting around on crutches and in a wheelchair. Her original prosthesis was not fitted properly and hurt her, so she stopped using it, Bates said.

A new prosthesis equipped with a microchip "would allow her to move into adolescence and gain independence," Bates said.

The new prosthesis lasts three years, so Bates included 19 of them, totalling \$2 million, in her calculation of Zauflik's future expenses.

But the total tab of \$2.6 million reaches \$5.4 million when adjusted for inflation, another witness for Zauflik, actuary David L. Hopkins, testified. He based his total on 2.5 percent yearly increases in medical costs, compounded annually.

Zauflik is expected to testify Friday morning to the jury of eight women and four men.